BEST EVER MAG!

N-GAGE QD FIRST LOOK | MONSTER HUNTER BLOWN OPEN | VAN HELSING: REVIEWED INSIDE!

COMPUTER & VIDEO GAMES

CVG

THE WORLD'S FIRST & BEST GAMES MAG

ZELDA FOUR SWORDS

REVIEWED: Link's GameCube multiplayer masterpiece

FIRST PS3 DETAILS

Two versions of Sony's next-gen giant revealed!

DEATH JR.

FIRST PSP GAME

Hot pics and insider info! The future of handheld gaming is in this mag

Never buy a duff game again!

84 GAMES RATED

Hitman Contracts
Fire Emblem
Ninja Gaiden
TOCA 2
RalliSport Challenge 2
Euro 2004
Painkiller
Onimusha Blade Warriors
The Suffering
And a fat load more!

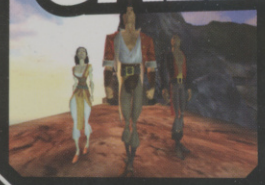
WORLD'S FIRST PLAY

Half-Life 2

Exclusive hands-on verdict of the hottest shooter ever on XBOX & PC

XBOX EPIC REVIEWED!

GALLEON



EXCLUSIVE: Five years in the making and it's pure genius

DRAKENGARD

Final Fantasy grows up, gets gory and goes for PS2's RPG crown

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XBOX PlayStation®2 PC CD ROM 18

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JUNE 2004

THE MONTH THAT...

CVG snuck into Half-Life 2 creator Valve's offices to bring you the biggest Xbox and PC scoop ever!

HALF-LIFE 2™

EXCLUSIVE: HALF-LIFE 2 PLAYTEST!

PLUS we reveal first details about the Xbox version!

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CVG IN NUMBERS

NUMBER OF GAMES	NUMBER OF GRABS	GAMES REVIEWED	FARTING ALIENS
294	869	84	1

GALLEON REVIEW! & TONS MORE EXCLUSIVES INSIDE!

COMPUTER & VIDEO GAMES CVG

JUNE 2004 ISSUE

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Get together with your mates and chase after big ugly beasts – it's like Saturday night down the disco, but online and dripping in warm monster blood!

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ON THE COVER

GORDON BENNETT, IT'S HALF-LIFE 2!

You know how some things just are? It's like Half-Life 2 – I just knew it'd be totally brilliant.

But I didn't expect it to be the mind-blowing monster our reporter saw when he flew to the US to be the first in the world to play it.

It's unlike anything you've played before. ANYTHING. And you can find out why right now, because we've gone in-depth on this year's biggest game. Plus you'll find the WORLD EXCLUSIVE on the Xbox version. Go now and enjoy.

Alex Simmons

Alex Simmons *Editor*

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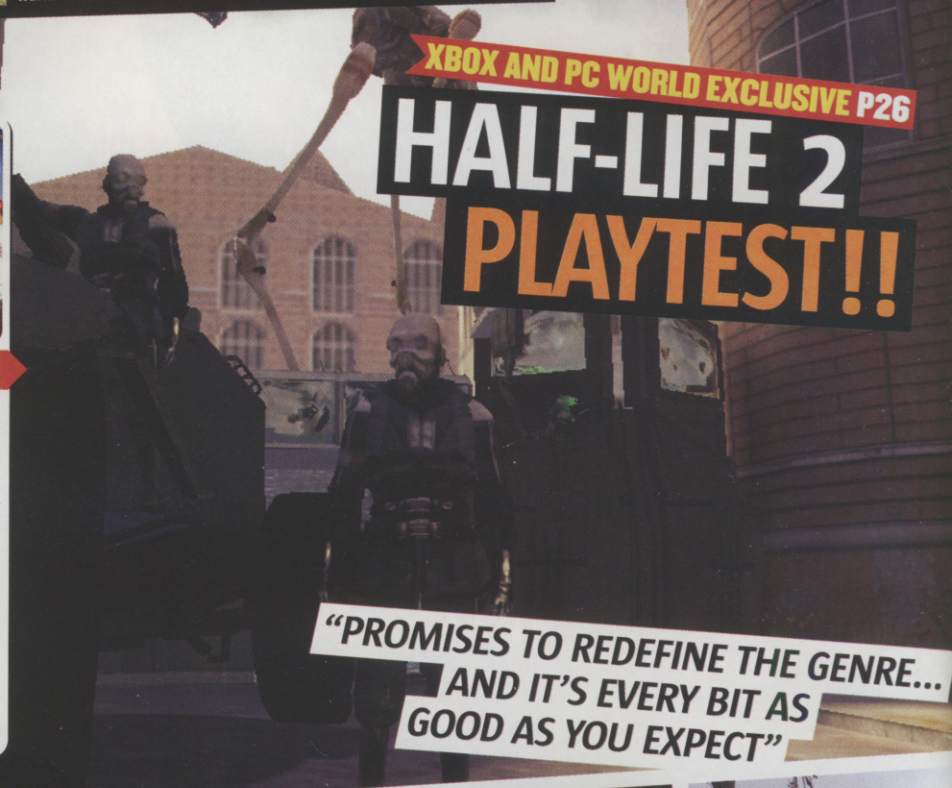
HALF-LIFE 2 PLAYTEST!!



"PROMISES TO REDEFINE THE GENRE... AND IT'S EVERY BIT AS GOOD AS YOU EXPECT"

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the team

BENDING CROWBARS AROUND POINTY ALIEN HEADS THIS MONTH ARE...

Alex Simmons **Editor**
After shaving his arse hair so his butt looks like twin Agent 47s in a sack, Al knifed Contracts to death.

Pete Walker **Managing Editor**
Pete rules the office with a fist of iron, but we've identified his weak point: he can't resist Jelly Babies!

Lee Skittrell **Reviews Editor**
Nightmare news: Lee is leaving! It's worse than Take That splitting up. All the best, Skits, we love ya!

Mike Cooper **News Editor**
Coopster got so excited about first PSP game Death Jr that old boney nearly paid HIM an early visit.

Graeme Boyd **Staff Writer**
Grazza's grown a beard like Gordon Freeman's fuzz. It's earnt him some cash – people think he's homeless.

Paul Davies **Contributing Ed**
Paul's gone all retro and developed an arcade obsession. He needs to get rid of the shellsuit, though.

Jaime Smith **Art Editor**
Jaime's turned into a Van Helsing-style design-Dracula: he stays awake all night and designs all day.

Mike Newson **Design Troll**
Chelsea fan Mike's been designing like the clappers, but only so he can get down the pub for the game.

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"SQUARE WANTS ITS OPUS TO CONJURE UP VISIONS OF CRIMSON CLASHES ON BLOOD-SOAKED BATTLEFIELDS"

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DEATH JR.

"FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE COMES THE FIRST SIGN OF LIFE ON PSP"

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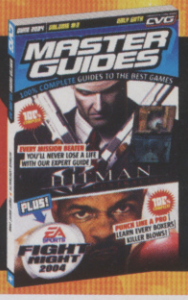
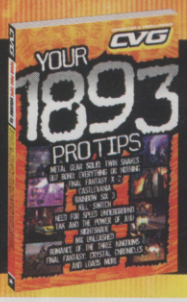


CVG MASTER GUIDES #3

100% COMPLETE GUIDES TO THE BEST GAMES

HITMAN: CONTRACTS
- Everything you need to become the ultimate ruthless killer

FIGHT NIGHT 2004
- CVG's class strategy guide to make you the true king of the ring



YOUR 1893 PRO TIPS

SO MANY TIPS YOU'LL GET STIFF NIPS!!

- Metal Gear Solid: Twin Snakes
- 007 Everything Or Nothing
- Final Fantasy X-2
- Castlevania
- Rainbow Six 3
- Kill.switch
- Need For Speed: Underground
- Tak & The Power Of Juju
- Nightshade
- MX Unleashed
- Romance Of The Three Kingdoms VIII
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- & tons more!

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READ OUR NEWS YOU MUTHA!

TURN OVER NOW!

Prepare your brain for twelve pages of pure, uncut and super-strength gaming news mainlined straight into your eyeballs. CVG always hooks you up with the essential lowdown: get to it!

planet CVG

HOT NEWS & GAMING GOSSIP FROM AROUND THE GLOBE

RELEASE YOUR INNER WHOOP

We're not big whoopers. When we see something cool we don't whoop. We bottle up the excitement and let it out quietly behind closed doors.

See, Americans whoop at everything, and the biggest whoopers of all are American journalists. Point is, next week I'm flying over to the E3 games show in Los Angeles, where all the hottest new games and hardware will be unveiled. It's gonna be a goddamn whoop-a-thon! PSP and Nintendo DS will be on show for starters. But on seeing PSP's first game Death Jr up and running this month I unleashed an involuntary big fat whoop of my own, to the disgust of the rest of the team. Fact is, I just can't contain the whoop any longer. Whoop! That's why Planet CVG is stuffed with news on upcoming titles that'll be on show at E3. Whoop, Whoop! Including a special E3 preview on page 12. Whoop, whoop, whoop!

Mike Cooper

Mike Cooper *News Editor*

this month...

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World's first screenshots of Capcom's awesome sequel!

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Is this hot next-gen sci-fi adventure for PS3 or Xbox 2?

WORLD'S FIRST PSP GAME REVEALED!

DEATH JR.

FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE COMES THE FIRST SIGN OF LIFE ON PSP

The mother of all bitch fights is brewing. Sony and Nintendo are slipping on their pointiest stilettos for a ruck at the E3 games show next week when PSP and Nintendo DS go head-to-head.

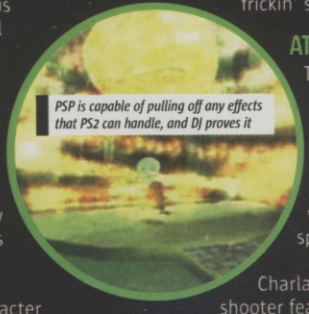
You've heard all the hype, and no doubt know that PSP is the odds-on fave for coming out on top. But it's been all bark and no bite – until now.

KICK IN THE NA-DS

This month Backbone Entertainment revealed PSP's first game, Death Jr, and proved what Sony's pocketful of rocket fuel is truly capable of. Handheld gaming has evolved, and there's no turning back.

Nintendo will have to muster one helluva surprise counter-attack next week at E3, because, if Death Jr is anything to go by, PSP will have DS slumped on the ropes within seconds of round one.

It's tough to fathom just how amazing Death Jr looks until you see it running. We're not exaggerating when we say that it appears every bit as good as any top-notch platformer on PS2 – the smoothly detailed 3D character models, special effects and super slick animations. Don't get us wrong, we're not predicting this to be an out-and-out masterpiece, but technically it's certainly frickin' spectacular.


PSP is capable of pulling off any effects that PS2 can handle, and DJ proves it

ATTACK OF THE BONES

The stumpy bone-headed hero leaps around levels with all the flamboyant flair of Jak from Jak II, while the weapons-based action is right up there with Ratchet & Clank's spectacular cartoon gunplay. Senior producer Chris Charla dubbed it "a fast action shooter featuring Death Jr". You'll get to go ballistic with stacks of high-powered supernatural weapons, like sparkly shoulder-

You'll need to use high-powered guns as well as the scythe to get the job done

It's not yet been confirmed whether Death Jr will feature wireless multiplayer

DJ hops excitedly around his bedroom. This is where the adventure kicks off

Whenever you pass a living organism, like a flower, it flops over and dies!

NEWS NUGGETS

UNMISSABLE BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM ALL OVER THE PLANET

MONKEY BUSINESS

Peter Jackson, scruffy hairball director of the LOTR trilogy, is remaking the original 1933 version of King Kong and is reported to be involved with a videogame spin-off. Nothing official has been announced but Ubisoft is believed to be developing it.

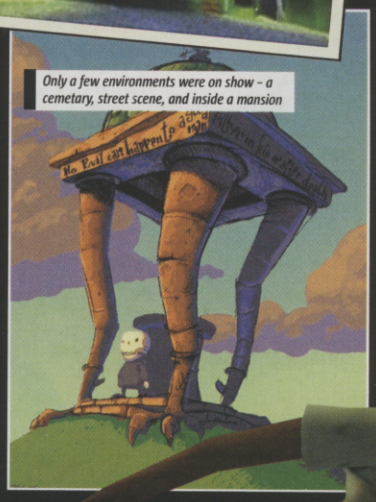
HALO 2

UPDATE!

Bungie has unveiled another new screenshot of Halo 2 in action – the first visual proof that Master Chief will be able to fight with two different types of weapons at once.

"HANDHELD GAMING HAS EVOLVED AND THERE'S NO TURNING BACK"

The game's visual style was inspired by Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas

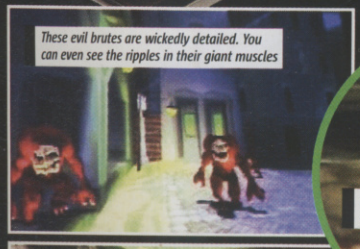


Only a few environments were on show – a cemetary, street scene, and inside a mansion

environment as the game progresses". Then he went on to make perhaps the boldest statement about Sony's handheld to date, that "polygon for polygon, the PSP has more power than PS2."

We're entering the dawn of a new era of portable 3D gaming and the possibilities are staggering. Death Jr is proof that games like Vice City, Pro Evo 3 and Metal Gear 2 really could look and play as good on PSP as they do on console. Plus it can take just over a month to port a PS2 game to PSP, according to Charla. So there's nothing to stop publishers shifting current classics like these onto Sony's mini marvel.

Death Jr should be playable at E3, and CVG will be there in force to bring you the hands-on verdict.



These evil brutes are wickedly detailed. You can even see the ripples in their giant muscles

In this scene DJ is forced to fight off a hoard of neon green killer bats!

You can pull off stacks of rapid and spectacular hack 'n' slash moves with your Scythe

mounted rocket launchers, but obviously the primary weapon is a whopping great Scythe. But what's awesome is the way that Junior uses this over-sized chopper. He flips at speed, twirling and swishing his blade like Yoda in Attack Of The Clones.

PLAYSTATION 2 PORTABLE

Charla also mentioned that Backbone Entertainment is "developing the game exclusively for PSP, and taking full advantage of the hardware, especially using morphing to reshape the

LIVING ON THE EDGE

DJ's equipped with mad acrobatic abilites. Here we see the pint-sized reaper performing a flamboyant pounce and stab manoeuvre that he uses to reach higher areas called the Scythe Ledge Grab.

We expect that DJ will use his Scythe to help him get around in other situations too like zip-lining between locations.

We love DJ's exaggerated body movements. He's one of the boldest and coolest characters to appear on handheld in ages

N-GAGE M-PROVED

NOKIA LIFTS THE LID ON ITS REVAMPED PORTABLE PLAYSTER

We weren't the only ones to slag off the bum design of the original N-Gage handset. The entire games industry took the piss out of it because of its hilarious flaws, like having to pull the handheld to pieces every time you want to play a game! But the sniggering has suddenly stopped.

This month Nokia revealed N-Gage QD, an updated and improved handset that suddenly establishes it as a major player. Vitally, Nokia has addressed all the laughing points and transformed the portable into a smaller, more practical and desirable plaything. QD isn't a full-blown successor to N-Gage. It's just what N-Gage should've been in the first place, with a few extra features chucked in too.

The most important change is that you can insert and remove N-Gage games into QD with ease. There's a slot on the bottom of the handset where you slide the game card in. Also, the button layout and D-pad have been overhauled so that they stick out more and are better positioned.

Plus QD doesn't make you look like you've got a mini satellite dish attached to the side of your head when you use it as a phone. You can press the handset flat against your bonce like a normal mobile!

It goes on sale later this month and is expected to cost £66 (99 Euros) with a contract or £133 (199 Euros) without. More info when we get it.

A plastic flap folds over the card slot to protect from grit and grime

BIG BROTHER

The new QD model is smaller than the original, 1.6cm slimmer on the hips and a smidge shorter.

Even though it's a different machine it's still completely compatible with it's older brother in terms of multiplayer wireless gaming.

11.8cm x 6.8cm

13.4cm x 7cm

SMELLS LIKE N-GAGE 2

We've been full-on news bloodhounds this month, sniffing every inch of the game industry's sweaty crotch for whiffters of new info on the next-gen machines.

And all our hounding has paid off because an anonymous bigshot working closely with Nokia revealed to Planet CVG that N-Gage 2 will feature wireless multiplayer games for up to 60 players, and promises to compete with PSP in terms of hardware and performance!

SNAKE'S NEW SKILLS

Konami has exposed details of Solid Snake's new close combat abilities in Metal Gear Solid 3. You'll be able to take down guards with a number of context-sensitive moves, using your bare hands, survival knife or the butt of your gun.

Hot or Not?

SONY PSP

The sight of Death Jr has sent our excitement levels rocketing into the stratosphere, and news of how easy it'll be to port PS2 games to PSP is equally unbelievable. Imagine wireless multiplayer GT4 and Pro Evo 4!

NINTENDO DS

It's not quite got our heart rates pounding like PSP, but on hearing that 30 DS games could be on show at next week's E3 show we're wired with anticipation. Plus if the touch-screen stuff works it could be genius.

SONY PSX

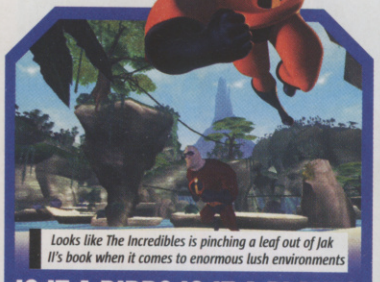
Sony's gorgeous PSX consoles are selling like ice-lollies in Antarctica at the moment in Japan. So badly in fact, that Sony has temporarily stopped production of the machines until sales pick up. Doesn't bode well for the upcoming UK versions.

ONIMUSHA BLADE WARRIORS

After playing Onimusha 3 we were all geared up for an ultra slick fighting encounter, but Blade Warriors has none of the series' polish or bite. It's a half-baked cash-in on a killer saga.

OLD N-GAGE DESIGN

The original N-Gage handset is about as user-friendly as a car with no doors, or wheels for that matter. So with Nokia's announcement of the N-Gage QD (see page 7), the old handset is about as appealing as a sharp kick in the mister.



Looks like The Incredibles is pinching a leaf out of Jak II's book when it comes to enormous lush environments

IS IT A BIRD? IS IT A PLANE?

NOPE, IT'S THE INCREDIBLES!

The Incredibles is the next movie from animation maestro Pixar. It's the story of a dysfunctional family of superheroes, and a videogame spin-off is already in development for PS2, Xbox, GC, PC and GBA.

You'll get to slip into Mr Incredible's snug red leotard and battle the forces of evil using your superpowers which include super-strength, invisibility, super-speed and elasticity. Super! It's a third-person action platformer and will be coming out simultaneously with the movie release this autumn.

Capcom doesn't seem to have altered or updated VJ2's graphics in any way

Sylvia and Joe are the only two playable characters announced so far

Viewtiful Joe 2

CAPCOM'S KUNG FU KID FLIPS BACK ONTO CUBE AND PS2 FOR MORE TIME-BENDING BEATINGS

There'll be masses of new enemies and masterful methods of countering their cunning attacks

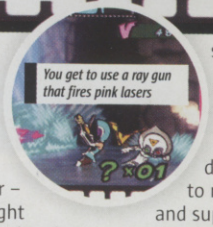
The original Viewtiful Joe breathed life back into a breed of game on the verge of extinction – the side-scrolling beat 'em up.

There had been rumours of a sequel to the barmy brawler for months, but doubt always hovered over the chance of a follow-up due to the game's limited cult appeal.

However, this month Capcom has proved that its pink-caped crusader is here to stay with the announcement of Viewtiful Joe 2 for PS2 and GameCube. It's expected to launch in spring 2005 and Planet CVG has been tipped that both games will be released simultaneously this time out.

VJ2 will be playable at the E3 games show next week, but Capcom has leaked a few slivers of info on what we can expect to see.

The story goes that the evil Gedow organisation is planning a brutal attack on Movie Land, and Joe and Sylvia must stop this catastrophe using only the art of insane whupass.

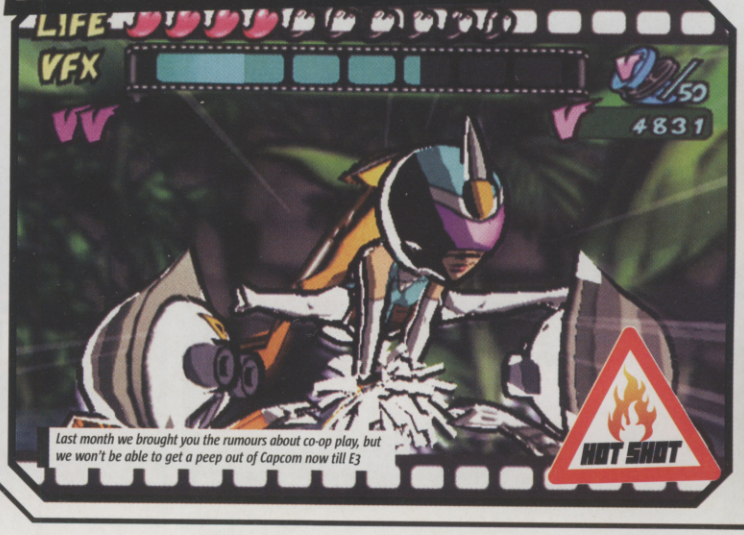


You get to use a ray gun that fires pink lasers

Sylvia's now playable from the start, and both her and Joe have a new VFX power – Replay! You can now record fight scenes and replay them to multiply damage by three times. But if you get hit while you're recording the on-screen action, you find yourself on the receiving end of three times the damage. It's like Burnout's 'risk reward' system – be daring, confident and skilful to reap the ultimate rewards and super-high combos. Plus you can also use the Replay feature to triple the health you gain from eating hamburgers by recording the moment that you pick one up.

We're certain there's going to be more exciting new additions to the gameplay when the game is fully revealed at E3 next week. Catch our first opinion next issue.

"RECORD FIGHT SCENES AND REPLAY THEM TO MULTIPLY DAMAGE BY THREE TIMES"

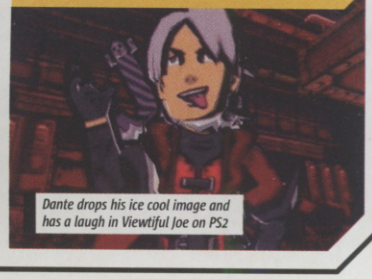


Last month we brought you the rumours about co-op play, but we won't be able to get a peep out of Capcom now till E3

HEN-SHIN-A-DANTE-BABY!

As you know, the original version of Viewtiful Joe is coming to PS2 within the next few months, though Capcom won't be pinned down to a date.

However, it's been revealed that Dante from Devil May Cry is an unlockable character in the PlayStation 2 version.



Dante drops his ice cool image and has a laugh in Viewtiful Joe on PS2

BAND OF BROTHERS

Ubisoft has announced a gritty World War II squad-based shooter for PC called Brothers In Arms. The horrific scenarios are all based on true stories and historical events. It's out at the end of the year.

RELIVE THE FANTASY

Square Enix is bringing Final Fantasy I and II to GBA, and bundling them together on one cart. They'll remain reasonably faithful to the NES originals, but there are rumours of extra dungeons and a new magic system.

PLAYSTATION 3

MORE THAN ONE CONSOLE! DOWNLOADABLE GAMES! THE FUTURE OF PLAYSTATION REVEALED!

There's been so much next-gen gossip there wasn't room to stuff it all into our Next Gen News column! We've the latest on the first PSP game, N-Gage QD, and white-hot new details about Sony's PlayStation 3!

In a recent interview, SCEE president David Reeves gabbed exciting info on Sony's next-gen console(s). That's right, come 2006 you might have the choice to buy more than one type of PlayStation 3! Believe it!

FUN AND FUNNER

"There might be a normal PS3 for gamers," Reeves said, "who just want to play the movies and have better games." Hinting that a second "home server" model with a disk drive could go on sale for "whatever it might be, 600 or 700 Euros." That's around £400-460. This version sounds strikingly similar to Sony's two PSX machines – the 160Gb and 250Gb units – capable of recording many hours of TV and burning DVDs.

The pure gaming version would obviously be much cheaper, but with the death of VCR this beefier home entertainment model could be the ideal replacement for clunky cassettes and fuzz-o-vision playback.

HOME DELIVERY

Reeves also shocked the world with talk of fully downloadable games and Sony's focus on broadband. At the moment broadband connections average around 500k, but Reeves mentioned that Ken Kuteragi, Sony's man at the top, is "even talking about 30Mb... people can just download whatever game they want." Imagine that, piping a new game the minute it goes on sale onto your PS3's hard drive!

Also this month Kiyoshi Nishitani, senior vice-president at Sony's Broadband Network company, said that Sony wants to use Blu-ray technology for PS3 – discs capable of holding up to 27Gb of data on a single side! CVG predicted this development back in our Rise Of The Machines feature in April, so you won't mind if we give ourselves a little pat on the back.

More on PS3 next month. Check out our Next Gen News column on the right for all the latest.

BATTLEFIELD ON PS2!

EA'S ONLINE WAR HERO PLANNING NEW CONSOLE ASSAULT

The awesome Battlefield series is charging onto PS2 at the end of this year, but the console version isn't set in the mothball era of the 1940s or Vietnam. No soldier! It's all present-day high-tech warfare in Battlefield: Modern Combat.

Like its PC cousins, Modern Combat is primarily an online affair, that will see up to 24 players gunning it out on some of the most notorious global war-torn hotspots. You'll get to pilot over 30 of the latest military vehicles and use advanced weapons systems such as laser-guided bombs. Plus you'll be able to communicate with your entire unit using the USB headset.

NEXT GEN NEWS

THIS MONTH'S TASTIEST NEWSIE NIBBLES ON THE NEXT WAVE OF SUPER-CONSOLES

PLAYSTATION PORTABLE (PSP)

■ It's been confirmed that PSP will have 30Mb of RAM as opposed to 8Mb, which had previously been announced. This is an important development because basically it means that PSP games will look heaps better and run smoother.

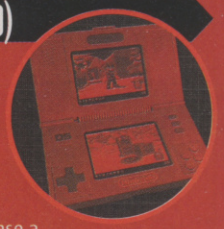
■ According to Backbone Entertainment's senior producer Chris Charla, "A huge number of effects that are given to you in software on PlayStation 2 are available in hardware on PSP".

■ A total of 81 developers are currently working on new games for PSP –24 in Japan, 23 in North America and 34 in Europe – including big names like EA, Namco and Activision.

■ PSP will definitely be able to connect with the PS2, along with other forms of digital media such as cameras.

■ Rez creator, Tetsuya Mizuguchi has announced that he is planning to release a sequel to the musical shooter on PSP (or Nintendo DS).

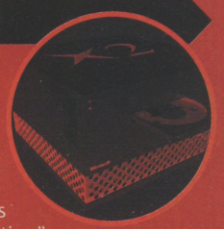
NINTENDO DS (PROJECT NITRO)



■ Eiji Aonuma, one of Nintendo's top producers, has blabbed one of the coolest bits of news we've heard all month. Apparently Nintendo is currently working on an all-new Legend Of Zelda adventure for DS.

■ Rez creator, Tetsuya Mizuguchi has announced that he is planning to release a sequel to the musical shooter on Nintendo DS (or PSP).

XBOX 2 (CODENAME: XENON)



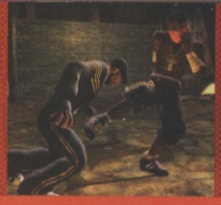
■ We recently spoke to Xbox top banana J Allard and got chatting about the possibility of the black and white buttons being removed from Xbox 2's controller. "Some of the feedback is that the black and white buttons are in a bad spot. Relocation is an option; getting rid of them is an option."

N5 (GC NEXT GEN)

■ Nintendo president Saturo Iwata referred to Ninty's next-gen console as GCNext. He stated that the machine will be focused primarily on "entertainment", which suggests we shouldn't expect the giant technological leaps that Sony and Microsoft will be striving for with their next-gen beasts.

DEF JAM: ROUND TWO

EA has finally confirmed hip-hop heavyweight Def Jam Vendetta II for PS2, Xbox and Cube. It'll feature over 70 players from the scene, including Snoop Dogg and Ludacris. It'll be slamming into stores this Autumn.



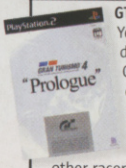
GAMECUBE 2004 LINE-UP

Nintendo of America just unveiled rough release dates for some of its hottest titles of 2004. Metroid Prime 2 is due for release between September and Christmas, as are Mario Tennis, Geist, Star Fox 2 and... MARIO PARTY 6!

Playtime Bullies

FIGHTING FOR SPACE ON CVG'S CONSOLES THIS MONTH

PS2 MOST PLAYED!



GT4 PROLOGUE

Yeah it's a cut-down taster of GT4 and easy to complete, but playing Prologue feels unlike any other racer out there. CVG's Graeme has already dubbed GT4 the best driving game ever... and the game isn't finished yet!

XBOX MOST PLAYED!

JUICED

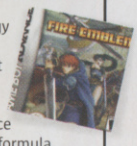
Modding your motor is insanely addictive. You've got so much freedom and so many parts to play around with, and the end results look gravy. Gotham-like action mixed with Max Power-style tinkering. Depth and adrenaline! Sweet.

CUBE MOST PLAYED!

ZELDA: FOUR SWORDS

News of a Wind Waker sequel and a new Zelda game for DS has sent us Link crazy. Mike is now replaying all the Zelda games and insists we all play Four Swords and finish it as a team. It's a dirty job, but hey.

GBA MOST PLAYED!



FIRE EMBLEM

Another strategy masterpiece from Intelligent Systems that adds a fantasy twist on Advance Wars' winning formula. Simple but inspired. We just wish that Nintendo would set the genius developer loose on some tactical titles for Cube!

PC MOST PLAYED!

FAR CRY

A funny onion as shooters go. It's just so beautiful it's like being on holiday. But the paradise setting is wickedly contrasted with brutal action. Plus the AI enemies are so intelligent that we're convinced they're are all ex-Mastermind champs retrained in the art of bloody war.

No surprises in the play modes – Story Mode, VS Battle, Survival, Practice and Training

KING OF FIGHTERS MOVES WITH THE TIMES AND INJECTS A BIT OF EXTRA BOING INTO ITS BRAWLING

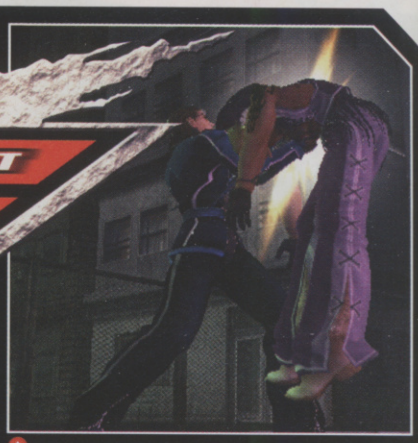
King Of Fighters has a large hardcore arcade following (see p32). On the flipside, the series has never really grabbed console gamers, mostly because the home versions always seem extremely retro and dated alongside other console sluggers. But that's all about to change.

SNK NEOGEO has sexed up the series and is aiming to break into the mainstream with KOF: Maximum Impact. This is the first original King Of Fighters title for PS2 and it's the first time that the saga has shifted into 3D. Plus, not to be outdone by the likes of Dead Or Alive, Maximum Impact isn't shy of flashing a bit of tit. Just check out Lien's eye-watering cleavage. Those puppies are packed to bursting point!

By our calculations, each of Lien's norks weighs about the same as a large pumpkin. That's like carrying a rucksack full of rocks on your chest! Like true gents, we'd give her a hand with 'em

The full roster of fighters is yet to be unveiled. However we can reveal that 14 of the most popular combatants such as Terry Bogard and Kyo Kusanagi will feature in this PS2 exclusive, along with six new warriors and four hidden bonus brawlers.

Obviously the fighting system is being enhanced for 3D play and they'll be stacks of new combos and complex in-depth fighting techniques to master. KOF: Maximum Impact hits PS2 on September 14th. Catch our hands-on verdict soon in CVG.



We're not convinced by the fighting arenas. They look pretty bald of detail and atmosphere at the moment

This is KOF's first 3D appearance, so can this inexperienced rookie really stand a chance against heavyweight 3D veterans like VF4 Evolution?

WHAT A BAD SPORT

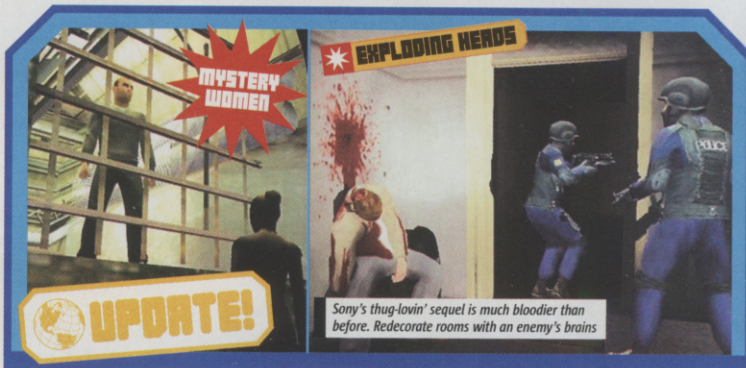
MICROSOFT CANS ITS 2004 US SPORTS LINE-UP FOR XBOX

In an interesting development, Microsoft has decided to hold back the release of the sequels for another year due to poor sales of NBA Inside Drive, NFL Fever and NHL Rivals.

Although these online XSN titles are huge in America they've failed to make an impact over here and Microsoft believes it's because the quality of the games has failed to make them stand out.

Here at CVG, we reckon it's actually good news, as it means publishers are putting more time and money into honing games to the highest level. Especially in the genre of US sports, where EA rules the roost but Microsoft has the potential to level the playing field.

The new XSN games will be ready for the 2005-6 season



Sony's thug-lovin' sequel is much bloodier than before. Redecorate rooms with an enemy's brains

GTA SHIFTS UP A GEAR

NEW DETAILS ON SONY'S FOUR-WHEELED PHENOMENON

One of Gran Tursimo 4's producers, Taku Imasaki, has blabbed on some of the new online stuff that we can expect from PS2's forthcoming racer.

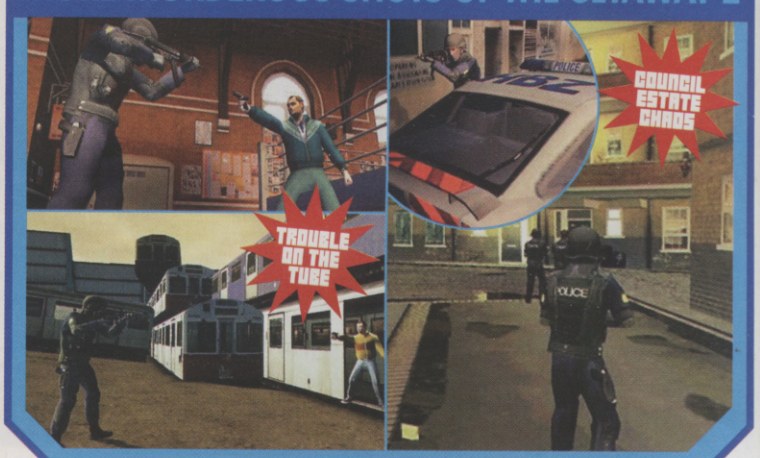
You'll be able to set up your own tournaments online, plus Sony will be running regular net-based contests. Imasaki reconfirmed that only six players will be able to race against each other, compared to Project Gotham 2's eight. There'll also be online ranking tables and a virtual showroom.

But one of the most interesting nuggets of news was the fact that there'll be a new handicapping feature that punishes players for driving dirty. If you ram or sideswipe an opponent, your car will be slapped with a speed restriction that slows your motor right down for about ten seconds.

GT4 is still planned for release this Autumn, exclusively on PS2.

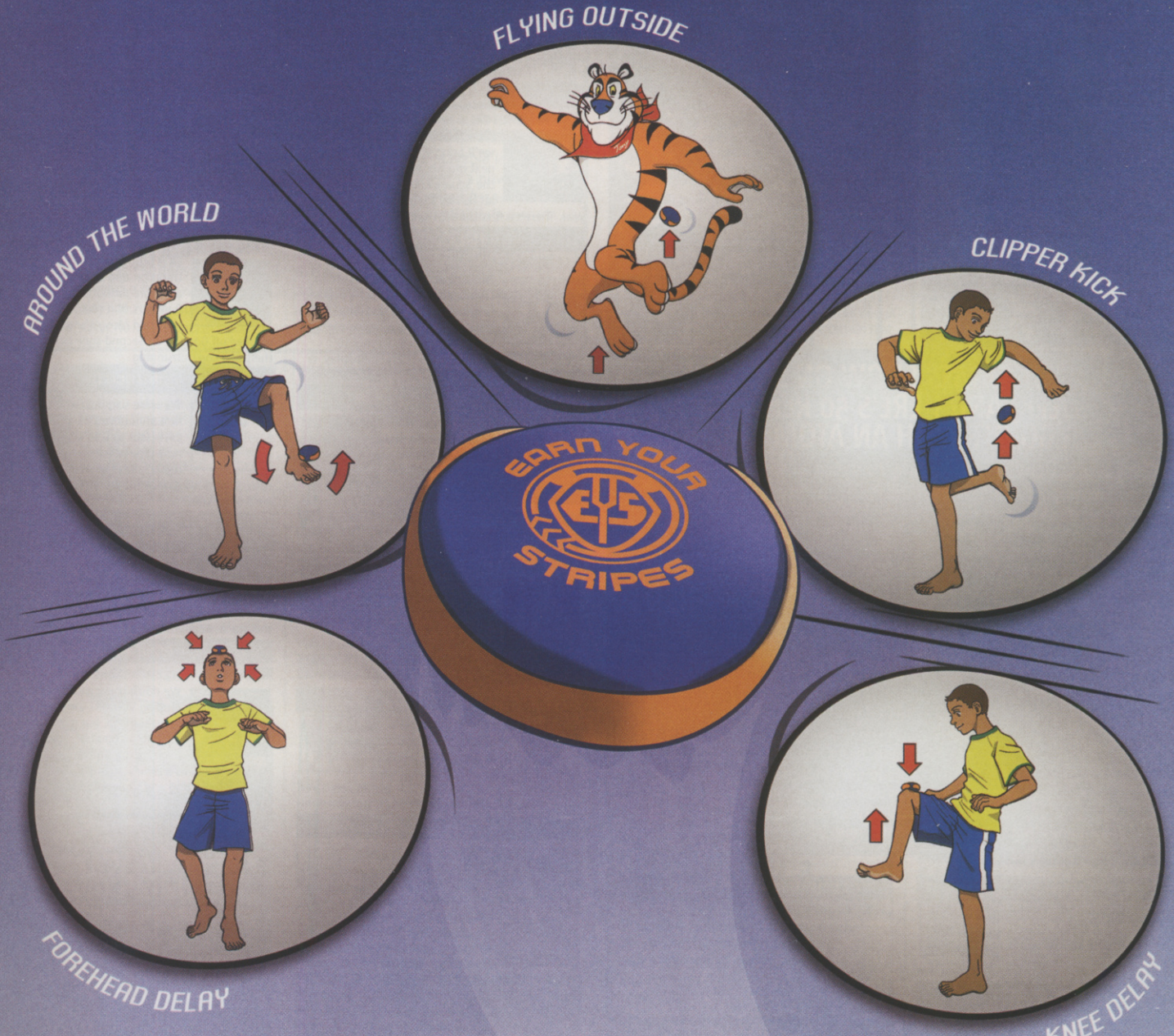
CONS AND ROZZERS

MORE MURDEROUS SHOTS OF THE GETAWAY 2



Footy buddy fever!

Get one free in special packs.



Get your free footy buddy in special packs.
Eat right. Practice hard. Earn Your Stripes.

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THE BIG 50!

THE MIGHTIEST GAMES SHOW ON EARTH KICKS OFF NEXT WEEK, AND HERE'S 50 REASONS WHY IT'S GONNA GO OFF WITH AN ATOMIC BANG!

We've been banging on about E3 for the past couple of months, but in case you missed it here's what all the fuss is about.

E3 (Electronic Entertainment Exposition) is the annual highlight of the gaming calendar, taking place this year in Los Angeles from May 12-14. It's a beast of an event. HUGE! All the world's biggest publishers and developers wait until E3 to unveil all their new games and hardware.

What's so amazing about the show is that we actually get to play most of the new titles on display, and tell you all about them in furiously excited detail.

Plus E3's always packed with surprises. Although all the companies announce a few games that will be there in the run-up to the event, they tend to keep their killer games under lock and key until the show kicks off. It's all about the wow factor!

So whose show is it gonna be this year? Will Sony steal the limelight with PSP, or can Nintendo claw its way back to the top of the pile with DS? Then there's Microsoft's mammoth force, Xbox... and Xbox 2! There's nothing in it. They're all potential E3 champs, and CVG has got a ringside seat.

We'll be on the show floor from dawn till dusk every day, reporting on all the hottest new games for you to read about in our E3 special edition issue next month. It's gonna be stuffed to bursting point with hundreds of top quality screenshots and photos, so don't miss it!

AREA 51

■ *PS2, Xbox* ■ *Midway* **CONFIRMED**

Out of nowhere comes one of the slickest sci-fi first-person shooters since Halo. Eradicate angry aliens in spectacular splat-o-matic fashion. But things start getting freaky when your body begins to morph and you gain unnatural powers.

BOKTAI 2

■ *GBA* ■ *Konami* **CONFIRMED**

Hideo Kojima's second light-sensitive vamp-zapping quest emerges from the darkness, even though Boktai still hasn't been released in the UK. Maybe Boktai 2 will come out over here before the original!

BOOTH BABES

Every year hundreds of hot birds flock to E3 to wear dental floss bikinis. They're known as Booth Babes and don't seem to mind sweaty geeks taking photographs of them. Hell, it's almost like they're paid to be there!

BURNOUT 3

■ *PS2, Xbox, GC* ■ *EA* **CONFIRMED**

We can't wait to get hands-on with Criterion's rebellious road hog and test out all the new maniacal moves like Slams and Takedowns. We're almost certain that EA will have multiplayer online stuff on display.

CALL OF DUTY: FINEST HOUR

■ *PS2, Xbox* ■ *Activision* **CONFIRMED**

The PC original was a triumph of adrenalised WWII combat on an epic scale. Now developer Infinity Ward – creator of the original Medal Of Honor – is turning its veteran expertise to console.

CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK

■ *Xbox* ■ *Vivendi* **CONFIRMED**

This is a dark horse. We reckon Riddick is going to gallop to the top of every Xbox owner's most-wanted list when it's fully unveiled next week. It looks like Splinter Cell set in outer space, with grumpy aliens!

DARK SECTOR

■ *PS3, Xbox 2* ■ *Digital Extremes* **UNCONFIRMED**

Dark Sector is the first next-gen console game to show its chiselled face to the world. Gameplay details are hidden behind a smoke screen of space dust, but it's tipped to appear on PS3, Xbox or both. Flick to page 17 for more.

DEATH, JR

■ *PSP* ■ *Backbone Entertainment* **CONFIRMED**

Our hands are trembling at the mere thought of gently caressing a PSP at E3, never mind actually playing a game on one! And since seeing Death, Jr in action we're dying for a taste of what it actually plays like.

DOOM 3

■ *Xbox, PC* ■ *Activision* **UNCONFIRMED**

Last issue Planet CVG broke the news that the Xbox version of Doom 3 will feature co-op play. We've packed our four-leaf clover and been careful not to walk under any ladders recently in the hope that we'll be lucky enough to get a shot of it.

FABLE

■ *Xbox* ■ *Microsoft* **CONFIRMED**

On paper it sounds like the ultimate RPG – you develop a character from birth to death, and every decision affects what type of person they'll become and how they look. Hopefully we'll get to play long enough to be out of nappies.

FINAL FANTASY XII

■ *PS2* ■ *Square Enix* **UNCONFIRMED**

It's expected to be playable, so we'll bring you first impressions next month. We're praying that the Square Enix Booth Babes will let us ride them like Chocobos this year. There's a first time for everything.

FIRE EMBLEM

■ *GC* ■ *Nintendo* **CONFIRMED**

Finally Intelligent Systems – creator of Advance Wars – is being let loose on GameCube. The handheld version is an arcade-style strategy scorcher. So this 3D version, with improved graphics and gameplay, is bound to wow the crowds.

GOD OF WAR

■ *PS2* ■ *Sony* **CONFIRMED**

Prince Of Persia-style acrobatics violently blended with mammoth Greek mythical monsters! You can ride on the head of a flailing 50-foot Cyclops and stab him in his one eye. Makes LOTR's cave troll fight look tame.

GOLDENEYE 2

■ *PS2, Xbox, GC* ■ *EA* **UNCONFIRMED**

It's crunch time! We'll find out whether it can outshine the legendary N64 version. This month we've heard that a key ex-member of Bungie's Halo team is working on it, which is promising. Bond in a Warthog? Could work.

GRAN TURISMO 4

■ *PS2* ■ *Sony* **CONFIRMED**

This month we revealed fresh info on Polyphony Digital's driving titan, including online tournaments and the all-new penalty system that's activated when you crash into opponents. Check out page 10 for the full lowdown.

HALF-LIFE 2

■ *Xbox, PC* ■ *Vivendi* **CONFIRMED**

As you know, we've already played Half-Life 2 this month and lived to tell the tale. But every nanosecond that we spend with the monster blaster is a gift from the heavens. Hopefully Valve will unveil the multiplayer.

JAK III

■ *PS2* ■ *Sony* **CONFIRMED**

Sony's spritely adventurer has evolved into a new breed of platform actioner. As well as a single-player epic there's a fully online battle mode to explore, with vehicles and teamplay. CVG will be taking on the Yanks in some hardcore head-to-heads.

KILLER 7

■ *PS2, GC* ■ *Capcom* **CONFIRMED**

Last month we uncovered Killer 7's schizo inner workings, but the proof is in the playing. We've harped on about how quirky and original the gameplay seems. Here's hoping it delivers the punch that it promises.

KILLZONE

■ *PS2* ■ *Sony* **CONFIRMED**

We've only played through a handful of Killzone's apocalyptic urban levels – because that's all there was when we got hands-on. But on Wednesday next week Guerrilla is rumoured to be revealing shitloads of new missions and features.

LEGEND OF ZELDA

■ *DS* ■ *Nintendo* **UNCONFIRMED**

Big shot Nintendo producer, Eiji Aonuma, dropped the bombshell that Nintendo is currently developing a new Legend Of Zelda adventure exclusively for DS. We'll soon find out how the whole touch-screen thing works!

MARIO 128

■ *GC* ■ *Nintendo* **UNCONFIRMED**

It's been far too quiet on the Mario 128 front for the past few months, which suggests that Nintendo is planning to stun the world with its appearance at E3. Miyamoto bigged it up in interviews soon after last year's E3. So let's see it then!

METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER

■ *PS2* ■ *Konami* **CONFIRMED**

Are you playing Big Boss or Snake? There's a conspiracy, but what is it? Can you really wear a crocodile's head as a disguise? We're not banking on any straight answers, but this is the first time we'll get to play it. That'll do for now.

NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2

■ *PS2, Xbox, GC* ■ *EA* **CONFIRMED**

EA is lifting the sheet off Underground 2's blingin' chrome and fibreglass chassis at E3. Rumours that the game will be subtitled Most Wanted have sparked off Gone In 60 Second-style fantasies of car theft and cop outrunning.

NINTENDO DS

CONFIRMED

We were sceptical when Nintendo first announced DS. It's not a successor to GBA SP, but an all-new type of handheld. No one really knows what it'll be like. But with 30 original games rumoured to be on show, we'll soon know.

N5

UNCONFIRMED

To be honest, we reckon that N5's attendance is about as likely as Shigeru Miyamoto announcing he's going to work for Microsoft on Blinx 2. But then again, E3 is where the magic happens and it's all about surprises...

PANIC MAKER

■ *PS2* ■ *Capcom* **CONFIRMED**

We don't know what they're feeding Viewtiful Joe creator Atsushi Inaba, but it must be something good because there's a circus going on between his ears. Panic Maker sees a skinny blue alien irritate humans by farting and singing to them. Genius.

LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER 2

■ *GC* ■ *Nintendo*

Don't worry – this is just the working title. Nintendo has assured us that Link's comeback to Cube will be revealed next week.

And if Zelda's N64 appearances are anything to go by, this second Cube encounter promises to be much harder – in the same way that Majora's Mask made Ocarina Of Time seem like a breeze. It could do with being heaps tougher because Wind Waker was widely criticised for being too easy, especially the boss battles. There are even rumblings on the games industry grapevine of GC/DS connectivity features!

You can even see their sinewy muscles twitch and flinch as they soak up MC's rifle rounds!

CONFIRMED

HALO 2

■ Xbox ■ Microsoft

We've literally just received some sizzling new details on Halo 2. Many of the environments will now be partly destructible, which suggests that you'll have you use some hefty weaponry to blast your way into new alien areas. Also 'Elite' Covenant characters are now believed to be playable in the multiplayer. And there's a new multiplayer mode called Assault, which calls for teams to plant bombs in enemy camps. An online co-op mode is also very likely. Plus another race of extraterrestrials is rumoured to make an appearance. Bungie is expected to spill the beans on everything Halo 2-related next week.

PHANTOM

■ Infinium Labs — UNCONFIRMED

Everyone thought it was a hoax console, and some still do. But on May 10 Infinium Labs relaunches its website, which ties in neatly with E3 and the homepage currently reads, 'The Critics, The Cynics, The Detractors, The Doubters WILL BECOME CONVERTS'.

PLAYSTATION 3

■ Sony — UNCONFIRMED

This is the one everyone's talking about. Over the past few weeks Sony chins have been wagging, and the first concrete details are coming out. We reckon that a tech demo showcasing PS3's capabilities might be shown at Sony's pre-E3 conference on Tuesday.

CONFIRMED

METROID PRIME 2

■ GC ■ Nintendo

Samus Aran's return to GameCube was first announced at last year's E3 show, but up until a couple of weeks ago next to nothing was known about this epic follow-up.

Metroid Prime 2 will feature four-way split-screen multiplayer action – plus there's been mention of a new Visor ability, dubbed 'Sonar'. Seeing what you can hear! Sounds like a strange sort of motion detector. We're expecting heaps of new info and the first batch of blinding in-game pics. Pore over 'em here next issue!

PRINCE OF PERSIA 2

■ PS2, Xbox, GC, PC ■ Ubisoft — CONFIRMED

When Prince Of Persia was fully unveiled at last year's E3 show, it rocked the gaming world with its kingly visuals, killer animation and golden polish. It picked up a heap of awards. That's a tough act to follow!

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4

■ PS2, Xbox, PC ■ Konami — UNCONFIRMED

As you know, CVG is home to some of the biggest Pro Evo fans on the face of the planet, and it's getting to that time of year when Konami thinks about teasing out slivers of info on its annual update. Pro Evo 4 online for Xbox?

PSP

■ Sony — CONFIRMED

Never has a handheld created so much buzz. Sony's blurb of it being the Walkman for the 21st century might well be a reality, thanks to PSP's multimedia functions. So can it steal iPod's crown as the ultimate portable accessory? Definitely.

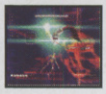
RESIDENT EVIL 4

■ GC ■ Capcom — CONFIRMED

At last! Capcom's Production Studio 4 has messed with the rigid Resi formula and boiled up the most gorgeous freak show ever to set foot on console. And it's exclusive to GameCube... or is it? We reckon a PS2/Xbox port could be in the pipeline.

REZ 2

■ PSP/DS ■ Sega — UNCONFIRMED



The original Dreamcast version is an underground techno-charged classic. This should showcase what the next-gen handhelds are capable of sound-wise. Rez 2 promises to fuse music and gameplay even more beautifully and addictively this time.

SHADOW OF ROME

■ PS2 ■ Capcom — CONFIRMED

Colossal gladiatorial clashes, nerve-jangling chariot races, masses of free-form exploration and Cornettos! Okay, no Cornettos, but plenty of tasty action and dusty sandle-wearing adventuring.

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

■ PC, PS2, Xbox ■ LucasArts — CONFIRMED

LucasArts' massively multiplayer battle-fest is scheduled for launch this September, and all the versions are online, with PC hosting up to 64 players and 32 on console. You'll be able to use voice chat to compare Yoda impressions.

STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO

■ PC, Xbox ■ LucasArts — CONFIRMED

This insanely good-looking FPS is set between Episode II Attack Of The Clones and Episode III. The Xbox version features Live-enabled multiplayer modes like Team Deathmatch. No lightsabers, though.

STATE OF EMERGENCY 2

■ PS2, Xbox ■ Bam! — CONFIRMED

We weren't big fans of the original. In fact we thought it was guff, but loads of folk seemed to like it, so we're keeping an open mind for the sequel. Vehicles would be cool as would more inventive missions. The GTA treatment, basically.

TEKKEN 5

■ Arcade ■ Namco — UNCONFIRMED

Planet CVG did some digging and we've been tipped by a highly reliable inside source that Tekken's next bout will be entering the ring at E3. Word is that the arcade version will be on show with a new look, new characters and arenas!

TIMESPLITTERS 3

■ PS2, Xbox, GC ■ EA — CONFIRMED

TimeSplitters 2's multiplayer is still arguably more exciting and than Halo's, especially as you can design your own maps. We're certain that developer Free Radical will uncover online modes and map trading for TimeSplitters 3!

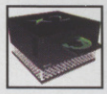
TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 2

■ PS2, Xbox, GC ■ Activision — CONFIRMED

CVG has followed Tony's flight to fame every kickflip of the way, but THUG's new features like the off-the-board stuff didn't work as well as we'd expected. Hopefully Neversoft can make good with THUG 2.

XBOX 2 (CODENAME: XENON)

■ Microsoft — UNCONFIRMED



Last month we brought you exclusive first details on XNA, the impressive software that will be used to power Microsoft's next-gen giant. Chances of a concept design for Xbox 2 being shown are pretty high. But don't bank on it.

VIEWTIFUL JOE 2

■ PS2, GC ■ Capcom — CONFIRMED

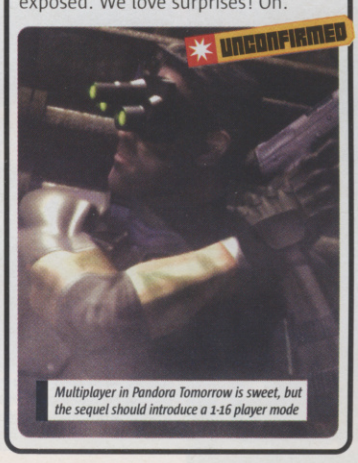
Style-wise little has changed (flick back to page 8 for proof), but then again, Viewtiful Joe was hardly shabby looking. The new Replay VFX ability sounds awesome, and we're itching to get hands-on. Don't miss our first verdict next issue.

SPLINTER CELL 3

■ PS2, Xbox, PC ■ Ubisoft

Ubisoft has officially released a list of games that will be on show at this year's E3 show, but Splinter Cell 3 wasn't on it.

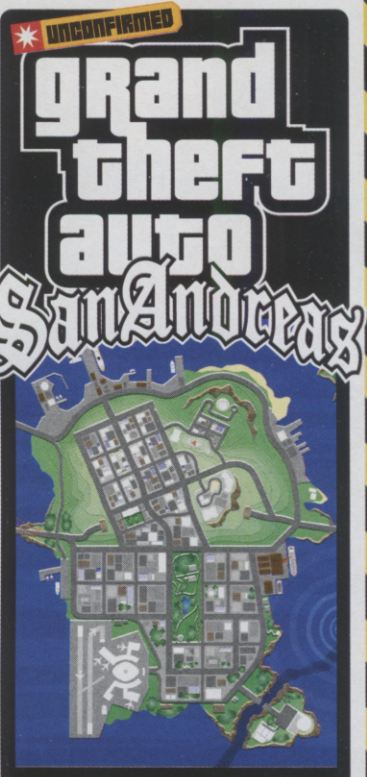
However, a reliable little birdie has told Planet CVG that an all-new Sam Fisher game is going to be exposed. We love surprises! Oh.



UNCONFIRMED

Multiplayer in Pandora Tomorrow is sweet, but the sequel should introduce a 1-16 player mode

UNCONFIRMED



GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS

■ PS2 ■ Rockstar

The entire world is waiting for the godfather of games to come out to play, but knowing Rockstar it's unlikely that we'll see any screenshots of San Andreas in action.

Most likely we'll be teased with a few nuggets of info and a couple of postcards from San Francisco. See, Rockstar doesn't play by the rules when it comes to GTA. That said, it's only six months until San Andreas goes on sale in the UK (October 22, to be precise), so a sneak peek might be on the cards. If it does turn up, forget the rest, because this is a guaranteed show-stealer.

VIRTUA FIGHTER 4 TUNED

■ Arcade ■ Sega — CONFIRMED

For the beat 'em up elite, VF4 Tuned is big news. Basically it's VF4 Evo 2. All the fighters have been updated and given new moves, plus there'll be new arenas and there's the possibility of new combatants.

VIRTUA FIGHTER 5

■ Arcade ■ Sega — UNCONFIRMED

Oh man. If Sega announces VF5 we might pop with excitement. It's rumoured to be in development, but nothing official has been announced. What better place than E3? We're praying that Sega makes our month by revealing an online console version.

THE WARRIORS

■ PS2 ■ Rockstar — UNCONFIRMED

Rockstar announced The Warriors at last year's E3 show, a game based on the 1979 gang-based B-movie set in New York. With Manhunt out of the way there's plenty of room for The Warriors to play second fiddle to GTA: San Andreas.

MORE HOT NEWS...

Flip to read this month's Big In Japan column. Feast your peepers on the latest batch of killer screens from Star Wars: Republic Commando on PC and Xbox. Plus see the first brutal pics of The Punisher in action, and read about Rainbow Six 3's new maps.

in Big Japan

JAPAN'S ARCADE SCENE IS ON THE ROCKS. CVG'S LAWRENCE WRIGHT TELLS IT HOW IT IS

The shooter floor at the Try Tower in Akihabara. Nothin' but shoot 'em ups as far as the eye can see

There aren't as many arcades as there used to be in the UK. Times have changed and our coin-gobbling shrines are dying out. What remaining games you find are often broken and are rarely updated.

However, over here in Japan there's no shortage of game centres and they're brighter, louder and busier than the ones back home. The machines work, the monitors are clear, and the cabinets aren't stained with dried kebab juice. There are plenty of new releases, so to the outsider it probably appears that Japan's arcade scene is thriving. But it's not.

SHADOW OF MEMORIES

The coin-op scene in Japan is a mere shadow of its former self. There are no new game centers, just old ones that have survived by having a better location, deeper pockets, or more luck.

There are a few diehards playing all time, and after school there's a rush with a surprising number of girls feeding the machines. There's even a post-business hours flurry – after 6pm the suits arrive, loosening ties and settling scores, briefcases propped against the machines. But real gamers are ceasing to flock to play the latest games, partly because consoles can now offer an arcade experience on the cheap, but also due to the fact that the community spirit of game center gaming is dying. Some game centers are trying new tactics to drum up business. For a while Konami's music games were single-handedly saving the arcades, and now the trend is multiplayer card games.

This guy came all the way from Finland to play this

Each player buys cards from a vending machine and competes using astonishingly elaborate and expensive networked cabinets. Redemption machines also play a major role, with most game centers devoting up to a third of their floor space to crane games, UFO catchers and medallion-tossing, light-flashing, toy-giving machines of every description.

Yeah, it's better here than in the UK, but it used to be better still, and there's a fear the bottom has not yet been hit. Play the games while you can. Tomorrow there'll be a McDonalds where your gaming memories were born.

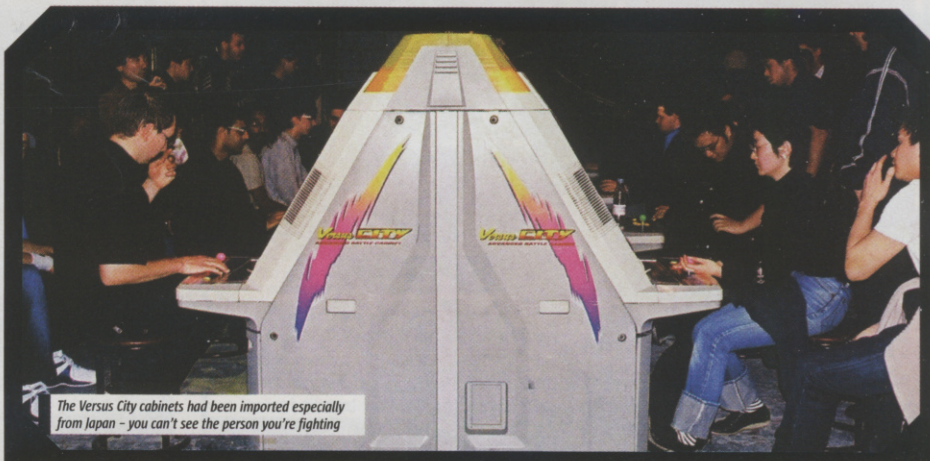
From Club Sega, five machines playing Samurai Shodown Zero. Opponents sit on machines behind these

GBA GETS TATTOOED

Nintendo has announced the Game Boy Advance SP Tribal Edition. This special edition handheld is emblazoned with tattoos designed by Mr Cartoon, the tattoo artist for celebs such as 50 Cent and Beyonce. It hits UK stores on 18 June.

TAKE OFFENCE!

Activision has officially announced Call Of Duty: United Offensive for PC – a chuffing huge expansion pack. With over ten new single-player missions set during famous WWII battles. It's out this Autumn.



The Versus City cabinets had been imported especially from Japan – you can't see the person you're fighting

ABSOLUTION FABULOUS

UK GETS ITS PLACE ON THE COMPETITIVE GAMING MAP

Europe's first ever all-fighting-game tournament, dubbed Absolution 2004, took place in London last month. Hundreds of the world's greatest gaming athletes were in attendance, and CVG was there to rub shoulders with the best.

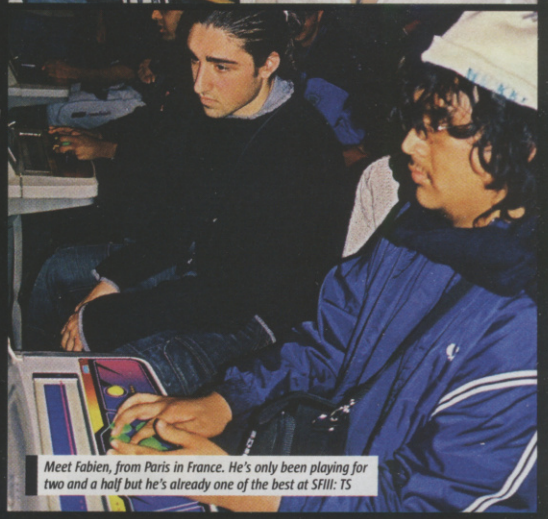
"I believe competitive gaming is underrated and we intend to change this," said Anthony Angeles. The CEO of Ulysis Professional Gaming, he speaks like Morpheus when he talks about games. It was Anthony's dream to bring the world's greatest players together, and it was our honour to be introduced to the tournament's top competitors, among them Fabien (21) from Paris, France, and the formidable Daigo (22) from Tokyo, Japan. These guys are quite senior in terms of years, compared to Justin, a 12-year-old VF prodigy from London. However the oldest was Kuni, age 34, from Tokyo.

Only two girls were up for a beating: Niki, from Italy, and Riri from Japan. They didn't win a thing, but we're sure they kicked a few guys where it hurts!

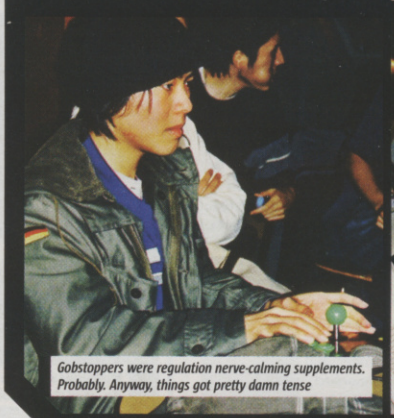
If you want to stay in touch with competitions like Absolution, check the UPG website at www.ullysis.com. Finally, our congratulations to the UK's Ryan Hart, who took the top prize in the Virtua Fighter competition. He thanked CVG for everything he knows.

The rules were to bring your own controller so no excuses for losing

This is Daigo, Japan's number one 2D fighting champion. Fear him!



Meet Fabien, from Paris in France. He's only been playing for two and a half but he's already one of the best at SFIII: TS



Gobstoppers were regulation nerve-calming supplements. Probably. Anyway, things got pretty damn tense

Players from Japan and Korea made the journey especially just to take part

ICRASH 'N' BURN

Eidos has announced arcade metal masher Crash 'n' Burn exclusively for PS2. It'll be coming up against fearsome competition, Burnout 3 in particular, when it goes on show at E3. But with online modes for up to 16 players, this is no joke racer.

TWO OF A KIND

Vivendi Universal has announced Crash Bandicoot: Unlimited for PS2 and Xbox and sees the ginger fur ball teaming up with his nemesis Dr Cortex. Spyro: A Hero's Tail (tail, get it?) is also coming to PS2, Xbox and GC. Out: Autumn.

SAMMY, SAMMY COOL

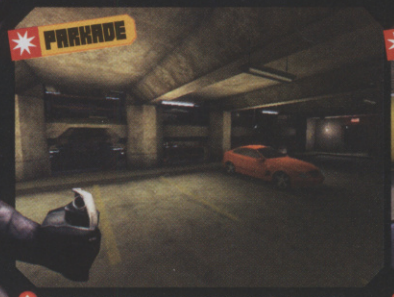
Sammy Studios will definitely be showing these games at E3 next week: Guilty Gear Isuka (PS2), Darkwatch (Xbox, PS2), Iron Phoenix (Xbox) and The Shield (Xbox, PS2).

OVER THE RAINBOW

NEW DOWNLOADABLE CONTENT FOR RAINBOX SIX 3 ON XBOX LIVE

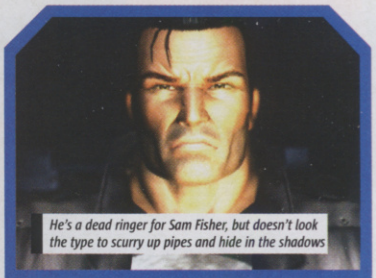
Ubisoft and RedStorm Entertainment have released a couple of new maps – Trainyard and Parkade – for the Xbox version of Rainbow Six 3.

So if you're one of the thousands of online marksmen addicted to what's now Live's most popular game you better get 'em quick and learn the level layouts sharpish, before your enemies do!



Scout out every nook and cranny in the multi-storey car-park for ideal ambush points

Skirmish through the disused carriages and take cover behind the crates – neat level this one



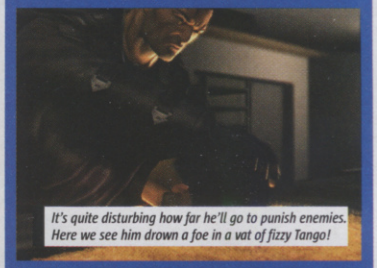
He's a dead ringer for Sam Fisher, but doesn't look the type to scurry up pipes and hide in the shadows

PUNISHMENT, FOR ALL YOUR SINS!

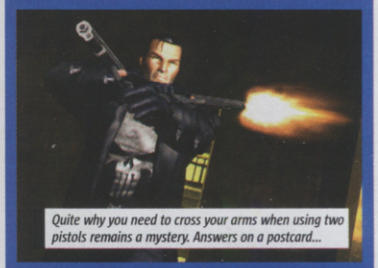
MARVEL'S MR GRUMPY SETS THE WORLD TO RIGHTS ON CONSOLE

The Pushisher has been dishing out his unique brand of heavy-handed justice in comic books for 30 years and now he's coming to stamp his authority on PS2 and Xbox.

As do-gooders go, The Punisher goes against the grain. Rather than perform a citizen's arrest, he'll shove a 12-gauge up a criminal's nostrils and squeeze the trigger, or shove their ugly mug into a vat of acid just for kicks.Vigilante justice has rarely been so brutal and hate-fuelled, but that's exactly what the anvil-jawed Punisher is – a no-bullcrap anti-hero who's set to stand tall alongside the likes of Max Payne. The Punisher guns its way into UK stores this Autumn, some time after the movie it's loosely based upon.



It's quite disturbing how far he'll go to punish enemies. Here we see him drown a foe in a vat of fizzy Tango!



Quite why you need to cross your arms when using two pistols remains a mystery. Answers on a postcard...

We'll be sure to get hands-on with the game at E3 and bring you our first take

Kick doors open and say hello Punisher-style – with the your boomstick!

XBOX LIVE

Microsoft's new Live 3.0 update will enable you to form clans and have your team's stats recorded while playing online

SAMUS-STYLE

The view from inside your helmet is very similar to Samus Aran's visor in Metroid Prime. Not that we're complaining

FLY, MY PRETTY

Zap enemies with a high-powered weapon, like a Trandoshan Slaver Shotgun (easy for you to say), and they'll fly back realistically

SHADOW MEN

Slip in and out of the shadows, using the darkness for cover. Then wait for an enemy patrol to pass and ambush them!

STAR WARS GOES COMMANDO

UPDATE!

ALL THE LASTEST SCORCHING SHOTS AND INFO ON REPUBLIC COMMANDO FOR XBOX AND PC

LucasArts has opened the floodgates on Star Wars: Republic Commando, drowning us in a sea of sexy new shots and drenching us with excitement.

Both the Xbox and PC versions will be fully playable at E3. CVG will be on hand to cane the crap out of the single and multiplayer modes. Don't miss our first impressions next issue!

Republic Commando gives us a sneak peek of the environments that will appear in Episode III and introduces new characters

EPISODE III PREVIEW

THE MORE THE MESSIER

The PC and Xbox versions will feature identical multiplayer modes, including straight Team Deathmatch and Capture The Flag

THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Unlike other corridor blasters like Doom 3, Republic Commando takes the action outside – and the landscapes are stunning

ARMED AND DANGEROUS

Arm yourself with twelve new authentic Republic Commando weapons including the famous Geonosian Elite Beam weapon. Oh!

MIND YOUR HEAD!

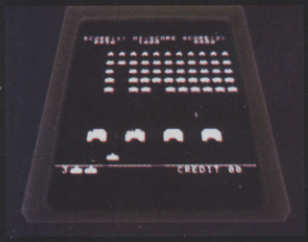
Your AI allies promise to move and react ultra believably to all the real-time events that occur throughout your conflict

BUG STOMPER

Not all enemies play fair. These winged creeps flap into the air, swooping down and attacking you from above

The Hot Seat

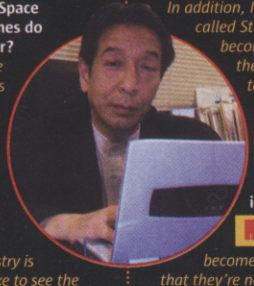
Toshihiro Nishikado, the creator of legendary arcade blaster Space Invaders, talks to Planet CVG



CVG: What do you think are the main differences between videogames in the 1970s and today?

Nishikado: *Games back then were completely focused on gameplay – that was an absolute requirement. That's why those games were fun to play despite their simplistic graphics. Games today, on the other hand, have complex rules and the focus has shifted to graphics. Now it seems to be more important for titles to have good visual effects than good gameplay.*

CVG: What do you think of gaming today 25 years on from the release of Space Invaders? What games do you like in particular?



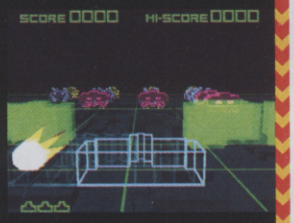
Nishikado: *There are more games coming out each month than ever before, but the only ones selling are famous titles from big publishers. There are too many platforms – I suppose the industry is saturated. I would like to see the arcade business revitalised to be as successful as it used to be. Personally, I like shooting games, but I don't like playing new titles because they're too hard. I also enjoy driving games – my favourite is the Gran Turismo series.*

CVG: How do you think Space Invaders stands up today? Does it still have something to offer modern gamers, or is it little more than a curiosity now?

Nishikado: *Space Invaders has been ported to many different platforms in recent years. I thought people who purchased the game (in Japan) would be those who had played it before at the arcade, but I learned that quite a few people completely new to the title actually bought it. I am interested in how it will be received by hardcore game fans nowadays, but the simplicity of the rules and gameplay should be appealing to anyone.*

CVG: The birth of 3D was probably the last 'big thing' in video games, what do you think will be the next?

Nishikado: *That's a very difficult question. I think 3D graphics will only improve over time, but the players will soon get used to it and demand even better graphics.*



I predict the next big thing will be virtual reality. As far as current VR technologies go, there has been a lot of progress but hardware capability and cost is still a big issue. When they become better and cheaper I think it will be used for videogames. Driving games will become a real driving experience, except you won't get hurt in the accidents. When the experience becomes this realistic, however, it may not be called gaming any more.

"I PREDICT THE NEXT BIG THING WILL BE VIRTUAL REALITY"

CVG: Did you intend the invaders to get faster the more of them you killed or was that just an accident – the program running faster when there were less things to update on-screen? Is this how you envisaged an alien invasion?

Nishikado: *Originally, I wanted to move 55 Invaders at the same time, but the limited capability of the hardware could only allow moving one Invader every 1/60 second. As a result the Invaders began to move faster as they decreased in numbers. But in the end this actually added more thrills to the game. The Invader character designs were inspired by the Martians from The War Of The Worlds by HG Wells. I remembered watching the film in my childhood. In addition, I heard that a film called Star Wars was becoming popular in the US, so I decided to create a space-themed game.*

CVG: What do you think of the retro games revival? What has inspired it?

Nishikado: *I guess games have become so complex lately that they're not easy to pick up and play, especially if you've never played games before. Instead, people may prefer to play retro games that have simple rules. Also, players who get tired of games these days may enjoy playing retro games as a quick fix.*

CVG: Did you own a pair of those official Taito Space Invaders underpants that are now selling on eBay for tens of thousands of pounds?

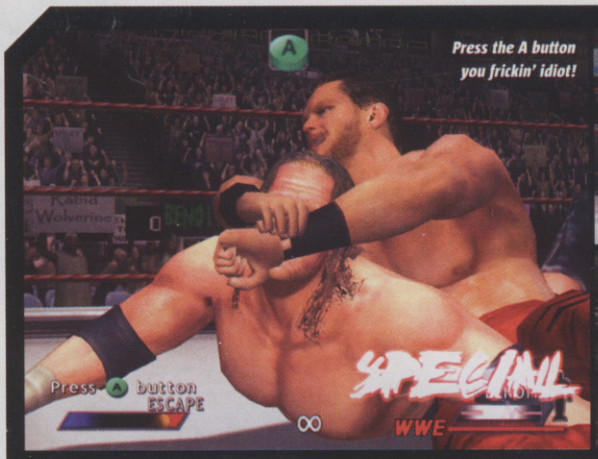
Nishikado: *No, I didn't even know about them. I don't have a pair.*

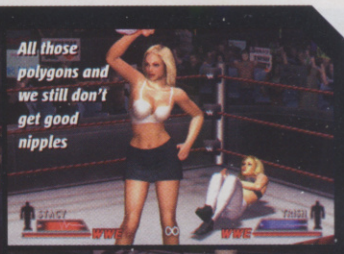
ROGUE DEVELOPER

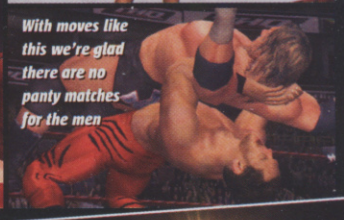
A bad month for GameCube. Factor 5, the maker of Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes and the Rogue Squadron series, has gone independent and left the protective wing of Nintendo. Sadly, it was believed to be working on a GC PilotWings sequel.

This month's BEST RUMOUR

You've heard all the talk about Xbox 2 not having a hard drive, right? Well, get this. Instead of an internal hard drive, Microsoft is planning a portable hard drive that doubles as an MP3 player to rival Apple's iPod!







PANTS A LOT

DAY OF RECKONING APPROACHES FOR CUBE

It's all change for grapple fans on the GameCube. Wrestlemania has bitten the dust, but standing in its place is WWE Day Of Reckoning.

For years we've been hoping that THQ would bring the PS2-exclusive SmackDown! to other consoles as it wees all over the competition, but now we may have to change our tune as Day Of Reckoning is shaping up to be the beefiest wrestler on the block.

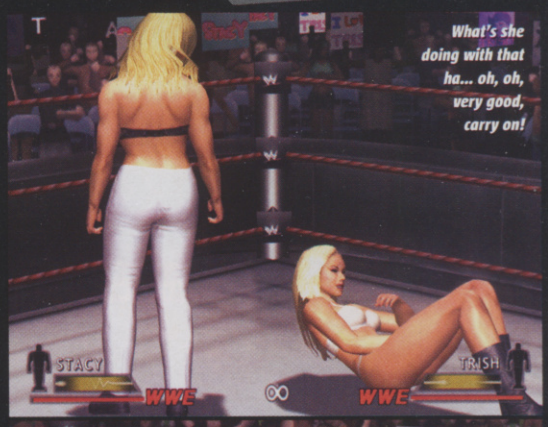
As with the Wrestlemania titles, the experts at Yukes are developing the game. This time, instead of creating something from scratch, they're packing it with features ripped straight out of SmackDown! Here Comes The Pain.

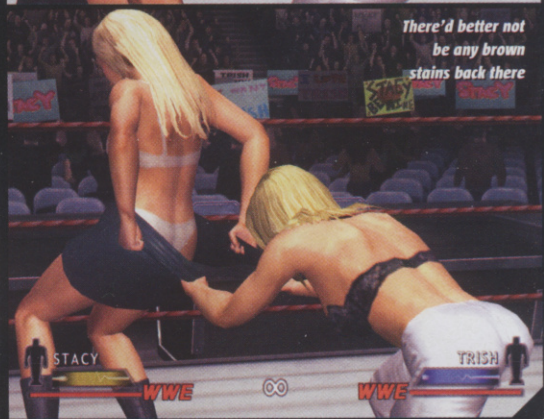
Bra And Panties matches were one of the highlights in the last instalment of SmackDown! Now they're set to make Cube owners go cross-eyed with new levels of pant-popping detail. Visually, Day Of Reckoning is already a stunner.

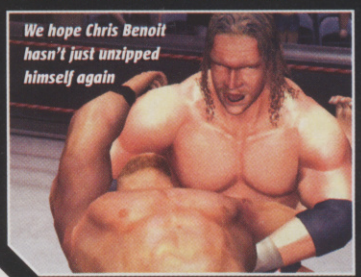
Another feature taken from the PS2 game is the inclusion of former WWE greats. THQ is staying tight-lipped over who exactly will be in the final line-up of WWE Legends, but one name has already been leaked and it's the one we were waiting for – Andre The Giant!

A career mode is also promised – dubbed School Of Hard Knocks, players can create a star and work their way through the minor leagues before going for the WWE title belts.

With over 40 WWE Superstars, a new submission system and realistic reversals, Day Of Reckoning is set to be something special. The game is set to slam onto the Cube this Autumn.





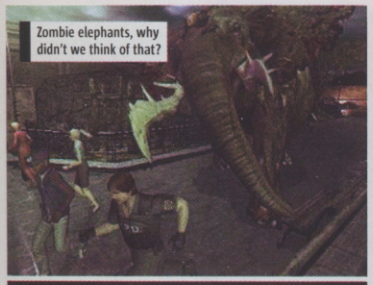


TOONTASTIC

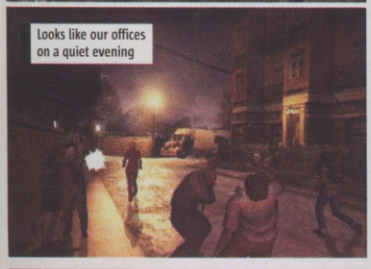
If you're a fan of Nickelodeon cartoons then get ready for a glut of gaming. The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie, The Fairly OddParents, Jimmy Neutron and Nicktoons – a title featuring all the Nickelodeon stars – are heading to a console near you soon.

APE ESCAPES ONTO EYETOY

Sony's unleashing monkey mayhem for the EyeToy with the announcement of Ape Escape: Ape Olympics, a series of 33 mini-games that we're 100% certain contain apes. Konami is also busy on an EyeToy sports game. Could it be a revival of the famous Track And Field series?



Zombie elephants, why didn't we think of that?



Looks like our offices on a quiet evening

ZOMBIE ZOO

ANOTHER RESI OUTBREAK

Hold your horses, Capcom! Or at least the undead ones. While we patiently wait for the UK (offline – boo!) version of Resident Evil Outbreak, Capcom has announced that not only is a sequel in the pipeline, but that it'll be out in some parts of the world before the end of the year.

Going by the imaginative working title of Resident Evil Outbreak File #2, the PS2 sequel continues the story of eight Raccoon City citizens in their desperate quest to escape the zombie hotspot.

The promise of new scenarios, never before seen enemies, branching gameplay and a choice of original or Devil May Cry style controls should appeal to the Resi faithful. The sight of zombie elephants and other undead creatures running wild should appeal to everyone else.

Once again, the horror is set to be available online or off. Let's hope European gamers are given the choice this time!

FUTURE SHOCK

First Look

Out of this world next-gen stunner

This month we've witnessed another example of the potential power of the next-gen consoles. Canadian developer Digital Extremes has uploaded a tech demo onto the net from its forthcoming sci-fi actioner, Dark Sector, that has already spent four years in development.

The atmospheric footage was not created with CG or using any pre-rendering, but is running in real time! The character models and animations are class, but there isn't much action on show – unlike the shockingly spectacular XNA tech demo, Crash, that Microsoft revealed last month at the GDC show.

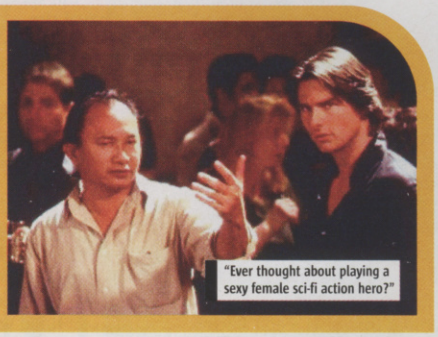
Although the developers are staying tight-lipped over what next-gen console the game is being designed for, rumour has it that Dark Sector will be coming to Xbox or PS3, or possibly both. Head to www.darksector.com to see the impressive trailer.

Style-wise, Dark Sector looks like a cross between the Doom 3 and Halo 2

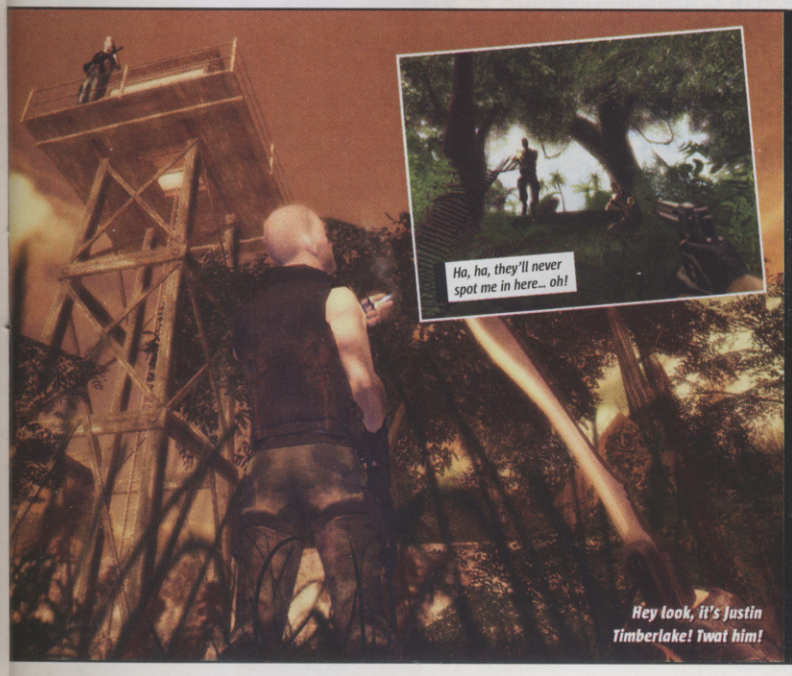
METROID AT THE MULTIPLEX

John Woo, the director of Face/Off and a slew of Hong Kong hits, is set to bring the adventures of Samus Aran to the big screen, having gained the film rights to Nintendo's popular Metroid series.

It's too early to say when the movie will be released, but it's believed that the plot will focus on Aran's origins and her subsequent battles with the Metroids.



"Ever thought about playing a sexy female sci-fi action hero?"



Ha, ha, they'll never spot me in here... oh!

Hey look, it's Justin Timberlake! Twat him!

CRY ME A RIVER

PC SHARPSHOOTER HITS CONSOLES

The makers of Splinter Cell are hard at work prepping the PC shooter Far Cry for a console remix. Ubisoft's Montreal Studio has been handed the task of transferring the tropical shooter to the consoles.

Far Cry Instincts boasts wide-open environments, distinctive locations, non-scripted AI and an unprecedented view distance. The console versions will expand the action with brand new scenarios that rely on a greater variety of skills and strategies than the original.

The best news if you're already a fan of the original is that Instincts isn't a port or remake of the PC version, but an entirely new game built from the ground up. There's no firm release date yet, but expect Far Cry Instincts to appear before the year's out.

CLANCY A GAME?

MORE RAINBOW SIX FOR XBOX

Xbox Live will get a much needed shot in the arm this August with the release of Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow. Nice name, guys, try something longer next time...

The sequel to the most successful Xbox Live game so far, Black Arrow offers new single and multiplayer missions and a host of new online modes and Live 3.0 features. Black Arrow also boasts a split-screen feature for offline play.

New objective-based game modes include Capture The Point and Capture The Flag. There's also the luxury of private team lobbies to plan strategies before online matches begin. More soon!

1 Aarrghh, bricks... bricks everywhere! What are you waiting for, dumbass – shoot them all!

2 One of me? four of you? What, with my reputation? Surely you must be joking...

3 Hooray – co-operative split-screen action ahoy! Xbox Live subscribers will also be able to play the game online

4 Quick, the heavily-armed ants are attacking! We're gonna need a bigger magnifying glass

WOO & CRUISE IMAGE © PARAMOUNT PICTURES CORP. – ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

NINA GETS MEANER

Tekken hottie Nina Williams is going solo in the new PS2 action adventure Death By Degrees. The game is set before the original Tekken and focuses on events leading up to the original Iron Fist Tournament. The actions begins in early 2005.

NEW BALLS PLEASE

Namco's Smash Court Tennis Pro Tournament 2 will be smashing fuzzy yellow balls all over your screens this Summer, this time with real players and tournaments.

WHEELY GOOD

New PS2 shots of Jak III reveal the hero will have new vehicles in the colourful multiplayer sequel. Just check out Jak's rad ride that seems to have no respect for the laws of gravity.

If you sing in a crowded area the locals will cringe and spill loads of precious coins

UPDATE!

PANIC MAKER

CRAZIER THAN A BAG OF SQUIRRELS!

This month Capcom has been kind enough to lavish us with some juicy details on Panic Maker for PS2, along with these sparkling new screenshots.

You play the teat-headed blue alien seen below, and have to morph into human form then play tricks on the citizens of planet Earth to get them to drop coins. You can sing stupid songs to freak them out, fart or chuck giant bowling balls into crowds of civilians to tick them off. And these are only a handful of your kooky abilities. Remember, this is a game from the wonderfully warped mind behind Viewtiful Joe!

Capcom is yet to officially announce a release date for Panic Maker in this country, but there are rumours that it will be released with the name Under The Skin in the UK.

The visuals looks like Jet Set Radio mixed with Viewtiful Joe

If you fail to take human form the locals get panicky and go nuts

The alien can scan people and mimic their appearance

EXCLUSIVE

This artwork shows how you'll leave no US base intact when playing as the Japanese. The Axis campaign opens when you beat the US one

Being able to play from both the Japanese and American perspectives will make for an interesting experience

OUT 2005 ON PS2, XBOX & PC

GOD OF WAR

INTRODUCING THE ONLINE WORLD WAR II GAME THAT COULD BE A BATTLEFIELD BEATER!

Take cover! There are so many war games raining down from publishers' shiny flak cannons at the moment that our asses are literally peppered with claims of historical accuracy, photo-realistic graphics, ultra-lifelike AI and multiplayer action that will thrust you into the gunpowder-scorched, gib-spattered fields of battle.

SCi's bid for warring glory is Midway (working title), a single and multiplayer campaign across land, sea and air based on the Mortal Kombat publisher's epic battle for supremacy in the international videogame market. Hah, not really. It's actually based on the Battle Of Midway, which spans four days of death, destruction and total annihilation from 4-7 June, 1942.

SQUAD MISSILE

The game is a squad-based shooter. Starting at Pearl Harbour, you'll be initially controlling what little there is of the US fleet as it's taken by surprise by swarms of Japanese fighters.

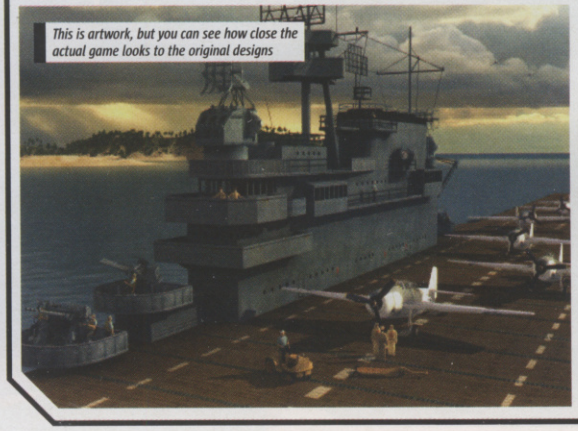
But this is no dull-as-arse naval sim – you can jump from man to man across your entire fleet and play as a gunner on a warship, a navigator steering individual vessels or as overall commanding god of war and issue commands to all your craft and men.

BANG UP YOUR BUDDIES

Later missions include cool challenges like defending island strongholds, giving you the chance to control planes and land vehicles, as well as boats.

The scope for multiplayer action is awesome, with you ordering your buddies to get into planes and take to the skies, or you yourself manning a single turret on the back of an armoured jeep and tearing up the enemy.

Precise details of the multiplayer modes are still to be confirmed but SCi is hoping for a whopping 32 players online for each system, though we're certain that there'll be multiple team deathmatch options.



This is artwork, but you can see how close the actual game looks to the original designs

Midway (working title) is over a year away, but there is already a lot to be excited about. It's online across the board and you can play both the US and the Japanese campaigns. There are loads of cool visual treats like heavily-populated boats and land masses, as well as clever camera modes like '40s colour tints and sepia tones. This looks like one war game that'll put a bullet up your butt when it arrives in a flashbang next year.

Jump from plane to boat to land in what could be the definitive squad-based WWII game

We don't want to sound like spods, but - man! Look at the water as the boats tear through the waves

The vessels look spectacular already and there's a whole year left to work on the thing!

IS IT REAL?

Here's a new batch of gorgeous screenshots from the highly anticipated Xbox title Fable. The latest role-playing adventure from Peter Molyneux traces your character's story from birth to death. Oh, and the soundtrack is being composed by Danny Elfman, the man responsible for The Simpsons theme tune. Aye carumba!

nationalleague

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3

GAME | COMPUTER & VIDEO GAMES CVG | KONAMI

LOCATION REPORT: BIRMINGHAM

WWW.PESLEAGUE.CO.UK

Mr Farrington, again, in the far corner, again with the losing... lost smile

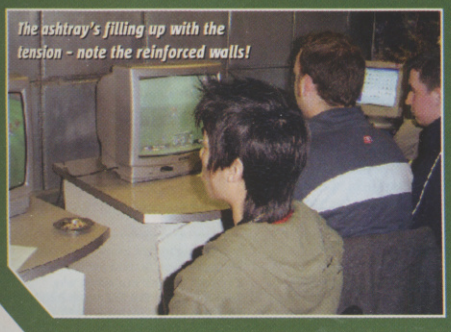
GALATICOS FEEL THE HEAT

CORSICA AWAITS THE BEST PLAYERS IN PESLEAGUE

A place in the sun is now within striking distance of PESLeague's finest. With Corsica set as the venue for September's PESLeague European finals, the battle for top slots in the UK leagues is fiercer than ever.

GONNA MAKE YOU SWEAT

We've now become used to seeing new PES stars scurrying out from the woodwork. Last month we gave a rallying call to anyone holding back on their games to come forward and face them like a man. This month is the aftermath of such long overdue clashes. Which is why Ross Forsyth and Martin Turner, head honchos in Edinburgh, were reminded of their own mortality by a guy called Louis Chan. And why Zesh Sadique took the bull by the horns and squeezed himself into second in London's Harrow league, making things uncomfortable for Tim Adegboye and Femi Paul. It looks like the fight is for fourth in Harrow, between Marci Delgreco and Andy Wilson after April's results.


The ashtray's filling up with the tension - note the reinforced walls!

THE LITTLE LEAGUES

Guys plugging away in the smaller leagues, namely Cardiff and Bath, must be thanking their lucky stars. Jonathan Francis in Cardiff, and Steve Godfrey in Bath are (touch wood) guaranteed a place in the UK finals. In Bath especially, it's pretty much the entire league going through in the playoffs if recent attendance is anything to go by. Will the major competitions be a wake-up call for these guys? We fear for their sanity after meeting PESLeague giants such as Mark Raffiee and Ian Wilson, recent Players of the Week on the PESLeague website.

BIG FISH, BIG PONDS

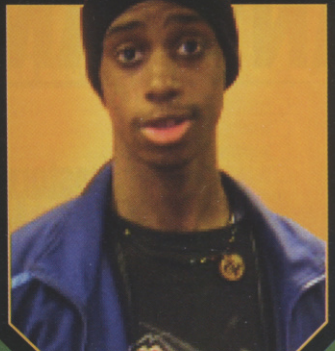
Our reigning PES champ, David Sefah, has only lost once in 15 games – drawing none. He remains the league's most formidable opponent, but we fancy the chances of Mark and Ian based on current form. Respect to Ian for strolling through one March afternoon, scoring modestly but keeping clean sheets.

Uncompromising deference to Mark Raffiee who racked up these results in one session: 6-0, 6-1, 3-0, 9-0, 3-1, 5-0, 7-0. Roll on the finals – we think windows are gonna shatter with the pressure. ✷

DERBY DAY DOO-DAH

Next issue we'll be reporting back from the first National PES Derby, pitching North against South at Birmingham's Aston Villa Events Centre.

Perhaps we met you down there? If so, look out for your photo on this page! You'll find out how David Sefah got on with his challenges from all-comers. Plus you can take the mick out of the CVG staffers, who stood tall after having their pride dented by seven-year-olds...



Charts

FIND OUT WHICH GAMES ARE FLYING OFF THE SHELVES AND WHICH ARE NOSE-DIVING INTO OBSCURITY, HOW THEY SCORED IN CVG AND WHAT WE RECKON TO THEM NOW

UK TOP 20 BESTSELLERS

ChartTrack — The official UK weekly leisure software charts ©2002 ELSPA Ltd, compiled by ChartTrack, with the name ELSPA acting as a link to our website www.elspa.com

POSITION	MOVE	GAME	FORMAT/S	CVG SCORE	SUMMARY	LAST WEEK	WEEKS IN CHART
1	NEW	SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW (UBISOFT)	XB GC	94%	There's nothing stealthy about Sam Fisher's entry into the top 20. He's rocketed to No 1 to the sound of trumpets and rapturous applause. Bravo!	-	1
2	↓	007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING (EA)	PS2 XB GC GBA	83%	Fizzes with quality and pizzazz, But it won't be a patch on EA's next 007 epic escapade, GoldenEye 2. As long as it has a Big Head mode that is!	1	5
3	↓	LMA MANAGER 2004 (CODEMASTERS)	PS2 XB	81%	This is the first of its kind where you actually get to bark orders at players using a headset! Plus the set-up's not all stuffy like Champ Man 4.	2	3
4	NEW	FAR CRY (UBISOFT)	PC	91%	AI enemies are so insanely intelligent that outwitting them is tougher than beating Stephen Hawking in a game of Name That Equation.	-	1
5	→	NORTON INTERNET SECURITY 2004 (NORTON)	PC	-	Heard of the Star Trek computer virus? It invades your system in places where no virus has gone before (sorry). Anyway, the bug-buster rides on.	5	15
6	↓	SONIC HEROES (SEGA)	PS2 XB GC	62%	It's time for Sega to reinvent Sonic... or we'll drop a saucer of milk on a motorway to coax the has-been hog into permanent bloody retirement	4	8
7	NEW	METAL GEAR SOLID: THE TWIN SNAKES (KONAMI)	GC	89%	Konami's reworked classic is awesomely polished and enjoyable second time round. But Sam Fisher is still the sneak-master supreme	-	1
8	↓	BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM (EA)	PC	88%	Playing soldiers doesn't get much sweeter than this – you can do near enough anything. The multiplayer is staggering and the soundtrack pumps	3	2
9	↓	UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004 (ATARI)	PC	87%	Just when we thought that Unreal was losing its edge Atari hits us with this. One of the fastest hard-hitting gun 'n' runners on the planet!	6	2
10	↑	FIFA 2004 (EA)	PS2 XB GC GBA PS1	79%	The climax of the season is already upon us and Euro 2004 is just round the corner. No wonder everyone's buying footie games at the moment.	14	23
11	↓	SOCOM II: US NAVY SEALS (SONY)	PS2	76%	It hasn't got Rainbow Six 3's looks or class. But Sony's tactical shooter still kicks up some of the best online multiplayer battle-happy action on PS2	9	4
12	↓	FINDING NEMO (THQ)	PS2 PC GC GBA	48%	It's sinking. Down one place on last week. Could this be the first sign that THQ's fishy tale is finally going belly up?	11	22
13	↓	NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND (EA)	PS2 XB	91%	The NFS Hot Pursuit games were awesome but small-time road rashers. Underground has given the series the monster recognition it deserves	12	19
14	NEW	THIS IS FOOTBALL 2004 (SONY)	PS2	36%	Even worse than Club Football! If you're even partly responsible for TIF2004's appearance in the top 20, be ashamed and see a quack soon as	-	1
15	↓	CRICKET 2004 (EA)	PS2 PC	-	Okay, we forgot to review Cricket 2004, and by 'forgot' we mean 'couldn't be arsed'. We've read all your angry letters... oh, there weren't any	3	P
16	↓	THE SIMPSON'S HIT & RUN (VIVENDI)	PS2 XB GC PC	67%	Homer and chums slowly veer off course on a deadly collision course with obscurity. The action is so forgettable we've, er, forgotten it.	13	22
17	NEW	COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO (VIVENDI)	PC	-	Reworked release of the online shooter that taught a generation of gamers far too much about real-life weapons and special forces tactics	-	1
18	NEW	RAINBOW SIX 3 (UBISOFT)	PS2 XB	84%	Soon they'll be turning Tom Clancy's shopping lists into games. Tom Clancy's King Edward Potato, Tom Clancy's Frozen Peas 3... Lucky rich git	-	3
19	↓	DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR (EIDOS)	XB PC	85%	With so many routes and alternative options, Invisible War has got to be one of the most genuinely replayable single-player games on any console	8	4
20	↓	LORD OF THE RINGS: RETURN OF THE KING (EA)	PS2 XB PC GBA	70%	EA's fantasy juggernaut is on its last legs. Another drop in the charts this week and next month it'll probably be cast into the Crack of Doom	16	20

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CVG MOST WANTED

1. HALF-LIFE 2 (XB)
Pete: "I'm still recovering from CVG's close encounter with Valve's master blaster this issue. Gordan's going to stick his crowbar up Master Chief's shiny green bunghole."

2. GTA: SAN ANDREAS (PS2)
Graeme: "With the whole West Coast thing going on, San Andreas is gonna be heavy. The scene's spot on for a GTA game – drugs, money, danger, style. It's all happening."

3. KILLER 7 (GC)
Alex: "Manga styling, insane storylines and seven deadly assassins each with stunning super powers! Staggeringly original and slick to the core."

4. PANIC ATTACK (GC)
Mike: "The new game from the certifiably insane creator of Viewtiful Joe! It looks just as fresh and funny as VJ did, oozing utter craziness."

5. DEATH JR (PSP)
Lee: "When I first saw the movie of Death Jr up and running I almost choked on my Chupa Chup. It looks like a class PS2 game!"

READERS' MOST WANTED

Toby Lords wrote to tell us he loves our new Import Reviews section, and it really shows in his five most wanted games.

1. NINJA GAIDEN (XB)
"Your Honed To Perfection story was amazing! I need this game."

2. ONIMUSHA 3 (PS2)
"I liked the last two, but Oni 3 looks like it's gonna cut 'em to shreds."

3. RESIDENT EVIL 4 (GC)
"I don't reckon I've ever seen a game with such amazing graphics!"

4. METROID 2 (GC)
"I can't wait to see all the screenshots that come out of the E3 show"

5. BREAKDOWN (XB)
"It's really original and I love that."

Send us a photo of yourself and a list of the five games you're most excited about with 15 words on each explaining why.
Readers' Most Wanted, CVG, Dennis Publishing Ltd, 9 Dallington Street, London EC1V 0BQ. Email: mailbag.cvg @dennis.co.uk (subject: Most Wanted)

QUAKE 2 REMIX

Doom co-creator John Carmack has announced that his development company id is currently reworking Quake 2 using the latest technology. However, no format was named. Could be for PSP even!

PAPER MARIO 2 CUBE BOUND

It's just been revealed in Japan that Paper Mario 2 is definitely coming to Cube. The latest addition to the crayoned RPG series is being developed by Intelligent Systems, creators of Advance Wars. No release date announced yet.

NEW AMPED 2 DOWNLOADS

Hook up to Xbox Live and rip the Slopestyle download for Amped 2 onto your Xbox hard drive. You get three massive new courses ~ Sky, Pioneer and Slopestyle 2003!

RELEASE DATES

CVG BRINGS YOU THE ULTIMATE CUT-OUT-AND-KEEP RELEASE SCHEDULE. MARK UP YOUR FAVES AND KEEP THIS LIST ON YOU AT ALL TIMES...

MAY 2004

			I WANT IT
PS2	CY GIRLS	07 MAY	☐
XB	UEFA EURO 2004	07 MAY	☐
GC	UEFA EURO 2004	07 MAY	☐
PC	UEFA EURO 2004	07 MAY	☐
PS2	UEFA EURO 2004	07 MAY	☐
PC	SOLDNER SECRET OF WARS	07 MAY	☐
XB	RALLISPORT CHALLENGE II	07 MAY	☐
PS2	ESPIONAGE	12 MAY	☐
XB	ESPIONAGE	12 MAY	☐
GC	POKEMON COLOSSEUM	13 MAY	☐
PS2	DEADLY SKIES 3	14 MAY	☐
XB	NINJA GAIDEN	14 MAY	☐
PC	TOCA RACE DRIVER 2	14 MAY	☐
XB	THE SUFFERING	14 MAY	☐
PS2	THE SUFFERING	14 MAY	☐
PS2	TRANSFORMERS	14 MAY	☐
PS2	FIGHT NIGHT 2004	14 MAY	☐
XB	FIGHT NIGHT 2004	14 MAY	☐
PC	CSI: DARK MOTIVES	14 MAY	☐
PS2	SYPHON FILTER: THE OMEGA STRAIN	14 MAY	☐
PC	TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF LA	14 MAY	☐
XB	VAN HELSING	14 MAY	☐
PS2	VAN HELSING	14 MAY	☐
XB	OPERATION FLASHPOINT: COLD WAR CRISIS	14 MAY	☐
PC	WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY	14 MAY	☐
PS2	GT4 PROLOGUE	14 MAY	☐
PC	ANNO 1503: TREASURE, MONSTERS AND PIRATES	21 MAY	☐
PC	BATTLEFIELD 1942: THE WWII ANTHOLOGY	21 MAY	☐
PS2	KARAOKE STAGE	21 MAY	☐
PC	PERIMETER	21 MAY	☐
PS2	BLOWOUT	21 MAY	☐
PS2	THE X-FILES: RESIST OR SERVE	21 MAY	☐
XB	THE X-FILES: RESIST OR SERVE	21 MAY	☐
PS2	SINGSTAR	21 MAY	☐
GBA	DRAGON BALL Z: TAIKETSU	26 MAY	☐
PC	TWO THRONES	27 MAY	☐
PS2	ADIMOO AND THE ENERGY THEVES	28 MAY	☐
PC	ADIMOO AND THE ENERGY THEVES	28 MAY	☐
PC	ALIAS	28 MAY	☐
XB	AMERICA'S 10 MOST WANTED	28 MAY	☐
PS2	BLADE WARRIORS	28 MAY	☐
PC	D-DAY	28 MAY	☐
PS2	HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN	28 MAY	☐
XB	HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN	28 MAY	☐
GC	HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN	28 MAY	☐
PC	HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN	28 MAY	☐
GBA	HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN	28 MAY	☐
GBA	KIRBY MAGIC MIRROR	28 MAY	☐
XB	OBSCURE	28 MAY	☐
XB	SYBERIA 2	28 MAY	☐

JUNE 2004

			I WANT IT
PS2	MASHED	01 JUNE	☐
XB	MASHED	01 JUNE	☐
PC	MASHED	01 JUNE	☐
PS2	COMBAT ELITE WWII PARATROOPERS	04 JUNE	☐
PS2	DRIV3R	04 JUNE	☐
XB	DRIV3R	04 JUNE	☐
PC	FAIR STRIKE	04 JUNE	☐
PC	OUTFRONT	04 JUNE	☐
PS2	PERFECT ACE 2: THE CHAMPIONSHIPS	04 JUNE	☐
PS2	SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW	11 JUNE	☐
PC	SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW	11 JUNE	☐
GC	SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW	11 JUNE	☐

POKÉMON COLOSSEUM

A dream for Poké-holics, the Battle mode would've been good enough on its own, but the added RPG makes it great

THE SUFFERING

A truly terrifying adventure that brings a real sense of panic and dread back to the weary survival horror genre

HOT PICKS

KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR THESE SIZZLING NEWCOMERS IN YOUR LOCAL GAMES SHACK

VAN HELSING

May's Hollywood Horror blockbuster movie goes all Devil May Cry in Vivendi's monster videogame adaptation

RESIDENT EVIL OUTBREAK

It's Resi, but not as we know it. Exciting new innovations, shame online play got canned for the European release

KILLZONE

PS2's answer to Halo 2, it's a long way off but we've seen enough already to know it's going to be worth the wait

GC	MARIO GOLF: TOADSTOOL TOUR	16 JUNE	☐
PC	GROUND CONTROL II: OPERATION EXODUS	18 JUNE	☐
PS2	.HACK//INFECTION PART 2	18 JUNE	☐
XB	SHOWDOWN: LEGENDS OF WRESTLING	18 JUNE	☐
PS2	SHREK 2	18 JUNE	☐
GC	SHREK 2	18 JUNE	☐
XB	SHREK 2	18 JUNE	☐
PC	SHREK 2	18 JUNE	☐
GBA	SHREK 2	18 JUNE	☐
PS2	RESIDENT EVIL OUTBREAK	18 JUNE	☐
XB	BREAKDOWN	18 JUNE	☐
GC	ASTERIX & OBELIX XXL	25 JUNE	☐
GBA	ASTERIX & OBELIX XXL	25 JUNE	☐
PC	CONSPIRACY	25 JUNE	☐
GBA	CRASH BANDICOOT FUSION	25 JUNE	☐
PS2	FORMULA CHALLENGE	25 JUNE	☐
XB	SHADOW OPS: RED MERCURY	25 JUNE	☐
GBA	SPYRO FUSION	25 JUNE	☐
GBA	CRASH BANDICOOT FUSION	25 JUNE	☐
PS2	THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS	25 JUNE	☐
XB	THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS	25 JUNE	☐
PS2	X-MEN LEGENDS	25 JUNE	☐
XB	X-MEN LEGENDS	25 JUNE	☐
GC	X-MEN LEGENDS	25 JUNE	☐
XB	SUDEKI	25 JUNE	☐
GBA	FIRE EMBLEM	26 JUNE	☐
PS2	SHELLSHOCK: 'NAM 67	JUNE	☐
XB	SHELLSHOCK: 'NAM 67	JUNE	☐
PC	SHELLSHOCK: 'NAM 67	JUNE	☐

JULY 2004

			I WANT IT
PS2	HEADHUNTER: REDEMPTION	02 JULY	☐
PS2	SPIDER-MAN 2	09 JULY	☐
XB	SPIDER-MAN 2	09 JULY	☐
GC	SPIDER-MAN 2	09 JULY	☐
PC	SPIDER-MAN 2	09 JULY	☐
GBA	SPIDER-MAN 2	09 JULY	☐
PS2	BLOOD WILL TELL	09 JULY	☐
PS2	SILENT HILL 4: THE ROOM	09 JULY	☐
XB	SILENT HILL 4: THE ROOM	09 JULY	☐
XB	CALL OF CTHULU	09 JULY	☐
PC	CALL OF CTHULU	09 JULY	☐
XB	THE BARD'S TALE	09 JULY	☐
GC	PHANTASY STAR ONLINE EPISODE III	11 JUNE	☐
PS2	NINA	12 JULY	☐
XB	FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR	09 JULY	☐
PS2	MONSTER HUNTER	12 JULY	☐
PS2	LEGEND OF KAY	23 JULY	☐
PS2	CATWOMAN	30 JULY	☐
XB	CATWOMAN	30 JULY	☐
GC	CATWOMAN	30 JULY	☐

AUGUST 2004

			I WANT IT
PS2	FIREFIGHTER FD18	09 AUGUST	☐
PS2	FINAL FANTASY XII	13 AUGUST	☐
PS2	THE PUNISHER	13 AUGUST	☐
PS2	ALTERED BEAST	13 AUGUST	☐
XB	JADE EMPIRE	13 AUGUST	☐
PS2	RESERVOIR DOGS	13 AUGUST	☐
XB	RESERVOIR DOGS	13 AUGUST	☐
XB	PAINKILLER	13 AUGUST	☐
XB	THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK	AUGUST	☐
PC	ULTIMA X: ODYSSEY	AUGUST	☐
PC	WORLD OF WARCRAFT	AUGUST	☐

SEPTEMBER 2004

			I WANT IT
PC	HALF-LIFE 2	SEPTEMBER	☐
PS2	CONFLICT: VIETNAM	24 SEPTEMBER	☐
XB	CONFLICT: VIETNAM	24 SEPTEMBER	☐
PC	CONFLICT: VIETNAM	24 SEPTEMBER	☐

OCTOBER 2004

			I WANT IT
PS2	KILLZONE	8 OCTOBER	☐
PS2	GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS	22 OCTOBER	☐
PS2	CALL OF DUTY: FINEST HOUR	29 OCTOBER	☐
XB	CALL OF DUTY: FINEST HOUR	29 OCTOBER	☐

RELEASE DATES SUBJECT TO CHANGE

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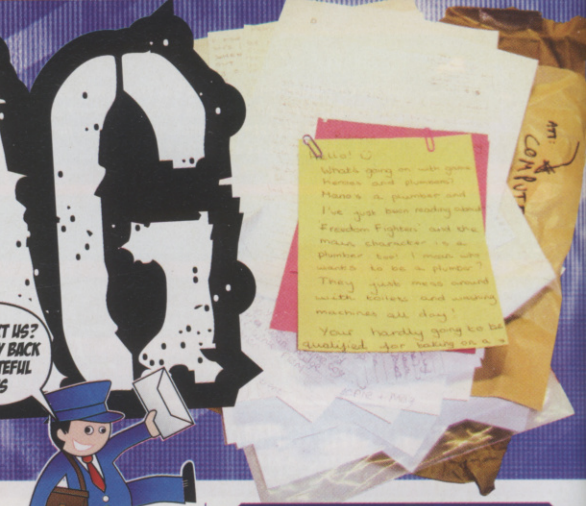
MAILBAG



We'd prefer it if you filled the mag. Means less work for us. So send your thoughts to: Mailbag, CVG, Dennis Publishing, 9 Dallington Street, London, EC1V 9BQ.

SOCOM SUCKS

Outrage: Sony culled the life out of these Seal puppies in solo SOCOM

Many people forgave the first SOCOM for its shortcomings because of an online mode that kicked ass better then Jonny Wilkinson kicks conversions. But why is the sequel's single player game still so crud? Crawl, shoot, crawl, get seen, die, fail mission, try again. Instead of strengthening the first game's weakest aspect they've only slightly improved the online aspect. Why only focus on a corner of the market that goes online when they could have launched a second game that appealed to all?

Richard, via email

CVG We agree, particularly when there are so few people playing online games with their PS2s in Europe. The online section of SOCOM is its most important aspect, but perhaps a killer one-player game would've encouraged more players to adopt online gaming.

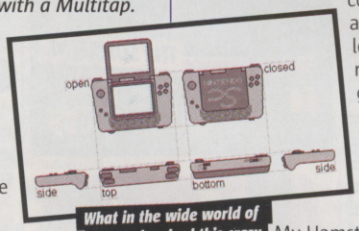
GREED IS GASH

Next-gen pads ought to have screens built-in to avoid the farcical prices non-GBA owners had to pay to play Final Fantasy: CC properly. I was lucky enough to be able to play four-player as I have friends with SPs but the prices non-owners had to fork out was ridiculous. And how about four ports for PS3 so Sony doesn't charge more for multiplayer fun?

Zola, via email

CVG Both cracking ideas. A little screen on your joypad would be wicked for inventories, maps and statistics, and PS3 better have four ports or we'll go round Kaz Hirai's house and batter him with a Multitap. But will the Big Three turn down a chance to flog peripherals?

DS REVEALED!

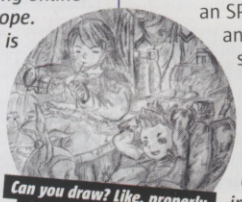


What in the wide world of sports inspired this crazy DS impression?

The DS will look like this... obviously! At least I didn't just take an SP and add an extra screen.

Michelangelo, via email

CVG Good work fella! Some fine artistic skills and a fairly believable impression of what DS might look like. In fact, you lot have been impressing us with your drawings this month – here's a brilliant FFCC sketch by James from Huddersfield, and some dude called Stuart sent in an imprint of his foot (no, we've no idea either). Keep chucking us your art and we might even run a permanent feature...



Can you draw? Like, properly draw? Then send in your pics and we'll print 'em!

FUN ANYONE?

Rockstar Ate My Hamster: The pinnacle of comedy gaming on Amstrad, Speccy and C64

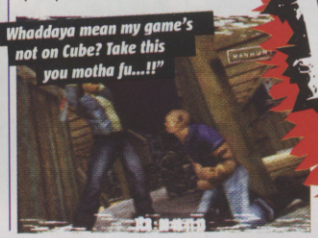
Is it me or do games developers suddenly think every release should make The Matrix look like 'My First Barney Game?' Obviously certain games like Manhunt need to be serious in content but it seems a bit of fun is being lost with each release. Even if a game is short you don't really mind as long as you have fun. I had a great game on the Amiga called 'Rockstar Ate My Hamster'. Anyone remember it? They could do a remake, especially with all this reality TV crap. Today's equivalent would be Pop Idol or Fame Academy and look at what turds they were. Sony! Microsoft! Nintendo! Three letters, F-U-N! Please?

Gavin, Armitage

CVG We remember Rockstar Ate my Hamster. It was crap. But you're right, at least it had a sense of humour, something that's definitely lacking in too many games. It's getting better though. Vice City's script had some genius humour and games like The Bard's Tale (previewed on page 48) are at least poking fun at themselves. Anyone think of any other games that place fun above straight-faced dullness?

CUBE CRISIS

I recently bought a GameCube and was then looking forward to buying GTA: Vice City, only to realise that the game wasn't on GameCube. I am gutted as this is a game I wanted most of all, along with Mafia and Manhunt. Wouldn't the people who make these



Whaddaya mean my game's not on Cube? Take this you motha fu...!!"

SHORT & CURLIES

HARD HITTIN', NO BULLSHITTIN'

So Shigeru Miyamoto is going to destroy a 50ft Mario sculpture? You nearly got me.

Smk Mend, via email

Mario on death row? Get your facts straight.

Anthony, Manchester

Okay, yeah, we are crazy April Fool japesters. You caught us.

SingStar? Hahahah! Even if it was real I wouldn't use it as toilet paper substitute.

Shaun, via email

Erm, that one's not an April Fool's gag. Ask Sony.

I've heard that Xbox 2 is so big you have to sit inside it and it takes a fortnight to install it in your house.

Chris, via email

It actually IS your house, you just don't know it yet.

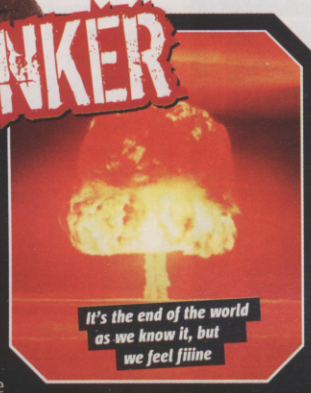
Are the Splinter Cell: PT controls on PC up to the job or should I get one of the console versions?

Nutjob, via email

The console controls are much better, but it looks amazing on a top spec PC.

CVG STINKER

JUDGEMENT DAY



It's the end of the world as we know it, but we feel fiiine

Console wars used to be the best things ever. Seeing one company pitted against the other, battling for the thrill and style of gaming supremacy. Now it's all about money. Nintendo and Sega are both dying breeds that need to be saved before they are gone completely. It was them who started this whole thing off in the first place and now they are being thrown on the scrap heap to make way for consoles with more power but no soul. We will never have as much fun on an Xbox or PlayStation as we did on the old Nintendo and Sega consoles. It's the end of an era.

Lewis, via email

The difference today is more competitors battling for a more mainstream market. We miss the old-school consoles too but you need to cut back on the apocalypse pills, mate – we've never had it so good.

NEW LOOK CVG:

BACON CRISPS OR GINGER DOG TURD?

Nice try CVG! You've hilariously changed the magazine in an attempt to appeal to the Gamesville Generation, thereby alienating all your older readers! You didn't fool this gamer!
Andrew, Llandeilo

Your mag is the best I've tried over the past year and a half. Nothing compares to it.
Mick, Liverpool

I like the general piss-take attitude, but I'd like to see more direct comparisons between formats.
Leeb1977, CVG forum

Written by a bunch of sex-starved losers.
Keyser7, CVG forum

I think it's hilarious – that's what gaming's all about, having a laugh.
Icarus20, CVG forum

Still top quality. Love the Big 50 and the reviews are always good and honest.
Stedwyer, CVG forum

The 'look' is good, the content is crap.
Original_aceman

When it comes to games mags CVG is the business.
Colin, Stevenage

What's with the Tips Nurse? She isn't even a looker.
Wassy2k, CVG Forum

CVG is a pile of ginger dog turd.
Chocolate_Spear, CVG forum

CVG, you are the masters of the written word.
Jenny, via email

We ain't afraid of your views – keep mailing or check our website to force your opinion on others in the Forums.

games make more money if they were released on all formats?
Joe, London

CVG *There are exclusivity deals (Like GTA being 'exclusively' on PS2) but we reckon Cube's position at the rear of the console pack is because it lacks these games. Gamers love Zelda, Mario and Final Fantasy, but most people want to race cars, shoot people, and, er, run a notorious crime empire. But if all games were released across all platforms, what would be the point of having different consoles?*

'MATURE' MAGAZINES

Sorry my English is not so good. I buy the Computer & Video Games magazine from 1985 on Ebay just for fun. Now I am big fan of your magazine. Can you tell me where I can find a site where are all the covers from the beginning of your magazine? Because I would like to know how they look and when the first issue was released and can you tell me where I can find old issues?

Issue No 1 of something called Computer & Video Games. Wazzat then eh?

Ronnie, Germany

CVG *Retro magazine purchasing? Now that's our idea of fun! In case you didn't know, CVG goes way back to 1981 and over that 23 years we've consistently been the best games mag out there (even if our covers used to look a bit crap, but that's the Eighties for ya). Ebay's a good place to find rare old copies and you could try www.gamemags.com, or just check out Count Yourself Lucky on page 114!*

OUTBREAK OFFLINE

I am disgusted that Capcom has removed online play from Resident Evil Outbreak for us Europeans. Why should I pay £40 for a game that has had the its heart ripped out? Again, it seems we're being victimised for being European. As a wise man once said, "If you go to a shop and pay for a turkey, you expect a turkey, not a chicken".
Gazmando

Resident Evil Outbreak: is it going to gobble like a zombie turkey?

CVG *Correct. Frankly, Outbreak being offline in Europe sucks (and yes, Capcom has finally confirmed this), especially since it was the whole selling point of the game. We shouldn't write it off completely though – from what we've seen Outbreak still holds up as a decent single-player zombie romp. But dammit, we wanted that turkey. Or was it a chicken?*

CVG STAR LETTER

NINTENDO DOA?

PS3 and Xbox 2 will be the end of Nintendo. While Sony and Microsoft play it safe, Nintendo continue to push the boundaries. Even now, with its last stronghold under threat from PSP, the big N has done something new and daring in the form of the DS. That's what makes Nintendo fun. Without them the games industry would be like F1 racing: very fast, very flash but ultimately very dull. I can't wait till E3 to see what the godfather of gaming will be lifting the curtain on. Let's hope they continue to innovate for years to come.
Anthony, Nottingham

CVG *Nintendo definitely aren't scared of trying something different. Even the Game Boy was expected to flop.*

Problem is, the innovation we're seeing from Shigeru and company is starting to look more desperate than revolutionary. We reckon DS, with all its fancy features, is going to make or break Nintendo – we pray the big N hasn't got it's big end in a terminal twist.

cex
WINNER
Star Letter-writers win £150 to spend at CeX. CeX is the place to trade in your old games, DVDs and consoles for new, or sell them for unbeatable cash pay-outs. With games starting from £3, the winner could get 50 games!
Visit www.cex.co.uk for more info.

"IF I'M A FREAK I DON'T GIVE A CRAP! GAMES ARE TOO GOOD TO MISS"

GRRRRL GAMERS

There are loads of girl gamers out there but being a gamer is not seen as the correct thing for girl to do. If I am a freak, I don't give a crap!

Puyo Pop: Pink, fluffy, cute, and for girls. xxxxxxxxxx

Games are too good to miss just because of some social taboos. Also, I cannot stand games made for girls. Developers seem to think that if it's pink, fluffy and cute then girls will love it. That sucks arse! Give me blood, guts and gristle any day!
Jenny, via email

"GIRL GAMERS: do they exist?" Yeah, we do. I've spent the last five years of my life acting as a cheatbook and walkthrough for my friends, and most of them are boys. I reckon you're scared of us taking over the gaming world. Don't worry, we'll break your neck first, so you won't feel any pain. I'll leave you with your Lara posters, ok?
Lizabeth, via email

CVG *Yikes, looks like we've stirred up a hornet's nest of hairspray and bra straps. It's, like, total girl power! Seriously, it's been fantastic reading all the mails we've had from our girl readers, and we promise to keep you in mind from now on. But we noticed you two didn't send in a picture with your mail...*

MAILBOMBS!

Spurting issue-infested pus all over our goddamn faces this month:

- Next-gen wishlist: What do PS3, X2, and N5 all need to include?
- Funny games: What makes you piss your pants with laughter?
- GTA San Andreas: What do you want to see in the series' next instalment?
- Nintendo: Can DS and N5 save them from videogame obscurity?

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CVG FINDS ITS VERY OWN POP IDOL WITH SONY'S SINGSTAR!

CHALLENGE CVG

It's girls against boys, beauty against beast, in CVG's SingStar karaoke chaos!

CHALLENGE RULES

Each contestant sings a solo song so they've got plenty of opportunity to show off the fine tenor of their voice. Or make a tit of themselves. Then a duet face-off decides the Challenge!

Alice pointed out every one of Suzy's bum notes like Nikki Chapman without the niceness

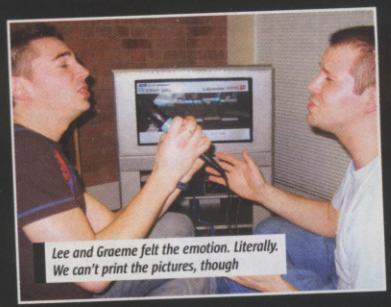
To look at her you'd think she'd have the voice of an angel, but she sounds like a trapped boy

Take a good hard look at these young men. Next time you turn on MTV Hits they'll be there

Dancing, this, apparently. To be honest Grazza and Lee busted out slicker moves

Proof that girl gamers do have skills, or evidence that Graeme and Lee sing like camel's arses?

TEAM CVG VERSUS ESSEX CLUB 2


Lee and Graeme felt the emotion. Literally. We can't print the pictures, though

If you read Mailbag you'll know we've been debating the existence of girl gamers, whether they're any good, and whether, in the words of reader Johno, they possess 'overwhelming masculinity'.

So when we got SingStar we thought it would be the perfect game to test whether girl gamers have any skills. It's singing, see, something that girls are good at. Not like cars or shooting or football or bloke stuff like that.

And we reckon we can safely confirm that girl gamers are not necessarily all hairy-handed munters – Alice and Suzy brought the CVG office to a standstill when they swooned in like the hottest two-girl singing sensation since Girls Aloud. Without the ginger one, the Irish one and the one no one ever remembers, obviously.

The mics are checked, the stage is set: let the vocal violence begin!

GRAEME SINGS BUSTED

"My gruff Scottish voice is best suited to heavy rock numbers," growled Graeme. Naturally, then, he plumped for Busted and wailed hard through Crashed The Wedding's thunderous riffs. Rawk! Score: 7420

LEE SINGS S CLUB

"Tonight, Matthew, I'm going to be appearing live as S Club 7," said Lee before suddenly emerging from a plume of smoke as S Club's hippest-hopper Bradley AND filthy blonde man-beast Jo! It's true, there ain't no party like an S Club party, especially if Rachel gets drunk and naked. Score: 7940

SUZY SINGS AVRIL LAVIGNE

"If I put my hair like this I look just like her," said Suzy,

Why do girls have to go and make things so complicated?

Check it out, it's just like Pop Stars: The Rivals except with more talent and fewer nobheads

smudging her golden locks across her face. To be honest, she didn't look much like the moany teenage whinge-bag, but she floated through Complicated like Lavigne on happy pills. Watch out for her on Pop Idol (probably the funny bits before the ad break). Score: 7760

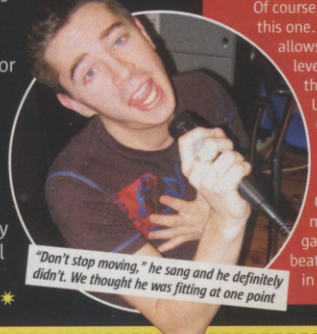
ALICE SINGS PINK

"I love Pink because she's an uncompromising role model in a pop industry dominated by candy-floss pop tarts." Exactly. We love Pink too, because she's got nice boobs and she looks well dirty. Alice kicked the ass off of Get This Party Started and even did some of the body-popping from the end of the video. Wick! Score: 7820

YOU CAN DUET!

Suzy and Alice stepped up first to duet for the win and chose Mis-Teeq's Scandalous. With Alice syruping out the verses and Suzy going all ragga on the rap bits (Bo!) the girls busted out a remarkable 8150.

This left Team CVG needing 8380 points to win. "Westlife, let's do Westlife!" yelped Grazza, showing a strange enthusiasm for Ireland's premier pop numpties. Despite enthusiastic 'Oh!s' from the lads and some dope boy band posturing they could only manage a scabby 7180. If Simon Cowell were here he'd say: "That was bollocks." ✷


"Don't stop moving," he sang and he definitely didn't. We thought he was fitting at one point

RESULT CVG GET WHUPPED

Throats throbbing and microphones limp, Team CVG were forced to suck up the fourth defeat on the trot. And this time they were beaten by girls. And not even mingers who you'd expect to be good at games 'cos they don't get dates: hot girls with nice clothes and pretty hair and stuff.

Of course, we're not really going to count this one. We love SingStar because it finally allows female gamers to compete on a level playing field. If we had played the girls at Pro Evo or NFS Underground or a proper boy game like that we would've kicked their arses.

Or would we? This is the first time we've featured girls on the Challenge and we want to do it more! Pissed off at our manly games supremacy? Think you can beat us at our own games? Well send in the form, sister, and bring it on!

BIGGER, BAD-ASSED, BETTER! CHALLENGE CVG GOES LARGE!

Just because we like to let the ladies win occasionally doesn't mean we're going to make a habit of it. We're gentlemen, see?

So come on! We're about to take Challenge CVG into the stratosphere with bigger competitions and more hardcore gaming showdowns. We want you to be part of it, so get your ass in gear, fill in the form, and send it in!

REMEMBER YOU'VE GOT TO BE IN IT TO WIN IT!

★HELLO, MY NAME IS: ..... [nickname] [age]

★BUT YOU MUST CALL ME ..... ★AND I'M ..... [game name]

★I AM THE BEST AT: .....

★MY ADDRESS IS: .....

★DAYTIME TELEPHONE NO: ..... ★EVENING TELEPHONE NO: .....

★EMAIL: .....

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MIDWAY

THE SUFFERING

"The best horror game ever made?"
86%-PSM2 Magazine

PSM SILVER AWARD

OUT NOW!

PC CD XBOX PlayStation 2

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PC CD ROM | XBOX

RELEASE DATE: SUMMER

GAME INFO: COST: TBC
PLAYERS: TBC

CONTACT INFO
- PUB: VU GAMES
- DEV: VALVE SOFTWARE
- WWW.HALF-LIFE2.COM
- ONLINE: YES

COMPUTER & VIDEO GAMES CVG

WORLD EXCLUSIVE HANDS-ON

Trust us, you'll want to keep the game's new enemies at a distance as much as possible

Half-Life 2

It's the hottest shooter ever, the game EVERYONE'd kill to play. Only CVG has played it AND got the scoop on Xbox's version. Lock and load, and let us take you on a tour of Half-Life 2

MAN, THOSE DUDES AT CVG BENT MY GODDAMN CROWBAR

If you're a fan of shooters, chances are you'll be squirting over the prospect of Halo 2, Killzone and Doom 3. But there's one game that overshadows even these giants: a game so big that every gamer everywhere is desperate to get their hands-on it. It is, of course, the sequel to a legendary blaster that paved the way for the rest, a story-driven epic which again promises to redefine the genre and just about every future action game too.

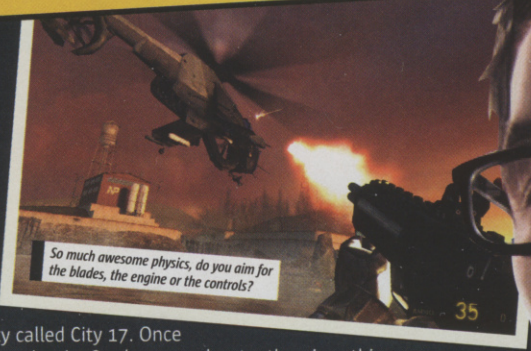
DAZED AND CONFUSED

Shit, even that intro doesn't do this monster game justice. Ever since we saw the demo of Half-Life 2 at last year's E3, we've been busting our nuts to get a go on this baby. And y'know what? After months of probing, we finally got inside developer Valve's studios to be the first IN THE WORLD to play Half-Life 2. And while we were there, we held guns to heads until Valve's genius programmers blabbed about the Xbox version. You will not read this stuff anywhere else, we shit you not.

So there we were, in Valve's HQ in Seattle, with Half-Life 2 running in front of us. "GIVE US A GO!", we screamed, so they did. And y'know, it's every bit as good as you expect. We'll get to that in a second – first let's talk about how the opening mission pans out.

Super sinister styling. D'ya reckon it could've influenced Killzone's Helghast?

It's quite literally a voyage of discovery, with you exploring an alien-infested European city called City 17. Once again you play Mesa scientist Gordon Freeman, the goggle-eyed nerd from the first Half-Life. But now it's a decade on. Apart from that, you know nothing. What the hell's going on? Why these freaks are running amok? Think it's time you found some answers...



So much awesome physics, do you aim for the blades, the engine or the controls?

INSIDE CITY 17

All around people dressed in white shamble through the city streets, heads bowed and shoulders slouched with a lifelike hunch, clearly terrified by the imposing gas-masked cops who watch their every move. Those stun batons look like they'd hurt, see. Approach these über-Nazis and you're met with tirades of abuse that'd make D-12 wince, plus electric sparks as batons thumb your flesh into a bloody pulp. And because you're unarmed – for the moment, at least – there's nothing you can do about it.

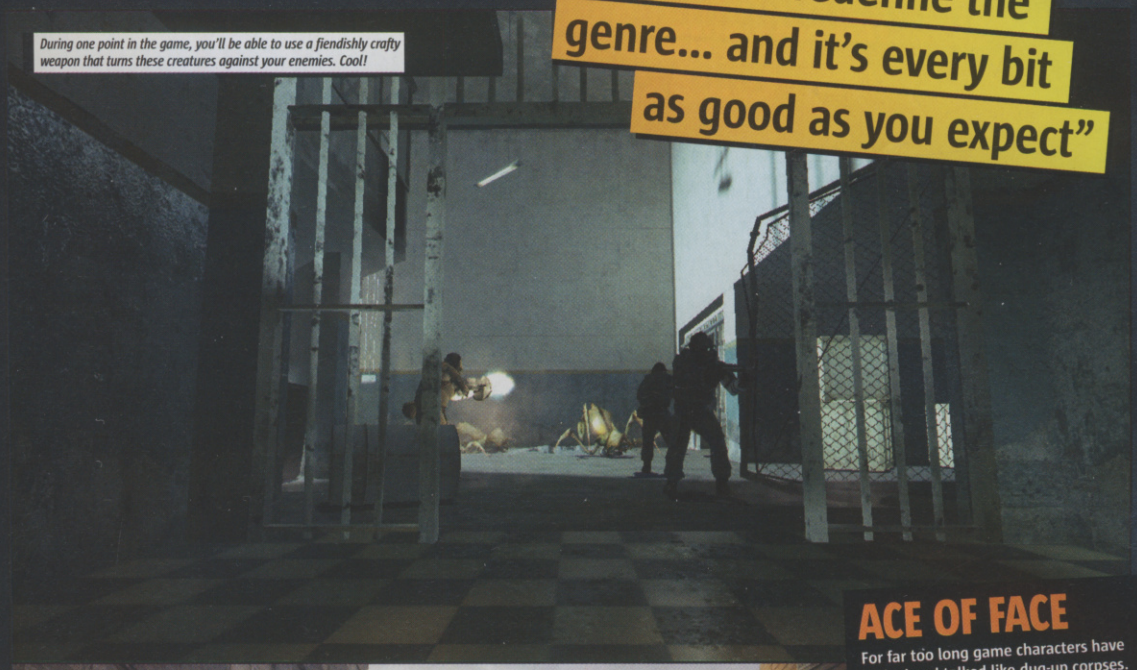
Alien drones flit around the city while in the background giant three-legged war machines stalk menacingly

I'M GORDON AND SO IS MY MATE

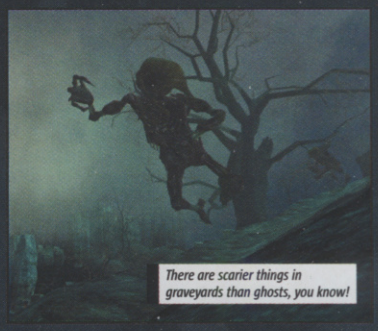
First-person shooter heroes, they're all the same. You know the sort we mean? Big, hulking, square-jawed lugs who spout crap one-liners like they're going out of fashion in gravely-voiced, just-swallowed-a-shaving-kit growls.

Which is why Gordon Freeman, the speccy, comedy ginger goatee beard-sporting scientist anti-hero from Half-Life 1 and 2, is such an exception, as you'll never hear him speak. Why? Because it's your actions that define his character, not vice-versa. With the game reacting dynamically to your actions, and with every person's playing style being slightly different, your version of Gordon could be very different to your mate's.

"Promises to redefine the genre... and it's every bit as good as you expect"



During one point in the game, you'll be able to use a fiendishly crafty weapon that turns these creatures against your enemies. Cool!



There are scarier things in graveyards than ghosts, you know!

It keeps you in a state of confusion, forcing you to desperately search for a familiar face or trigger to make your memory flood back like a burst river in a monsoon.

THE POWER OF MANIPULATION

But the sedate start won't last long. Hell no. Before you know it, the blasting begins, as we found out in the all-out action second level of our playtest.

Here a mad monk called Father Grigory leds you through a cemetery teeming with grotesque alien zombies. Armed to the teeth with heavy-duty firepower, it's time to open up a can of Whoop Ass on their alien hides. Bring it on you freaks!

It's this second level where the all-new Manipulator is introduced, a weapon enabling you take advantage of Half-Life 2's pant-creaming physics system, by picking up, throwing, destroying or pushing ANY object in the game. It's an amazing bit of kit and, like God just suddenly gave you a foot-long pecker, your first instinct is to go nuts and try it on everything.

Running through the graveyard you stumble across a bunch of discarded saw blades and (naturally) send them scything through the air with the Manipulator. Zombie heads roll on the floor like giant marbles as the razor-sharp blades scyth through rotting flesh.

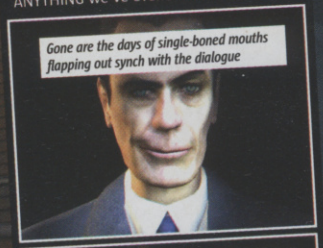
Then, when you can't find any more bits of metal to lob about, you switch to your shotguns and cut the dirtbags in half with blasts of hot leads. This hoses all over Resident Evil, trust us!

»

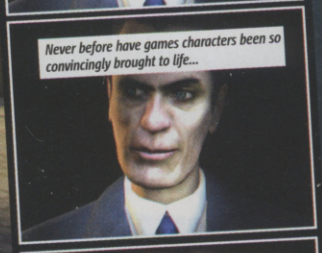
ACE OF FACE

For far too long game characters have looked and talked like dug-up corpses.

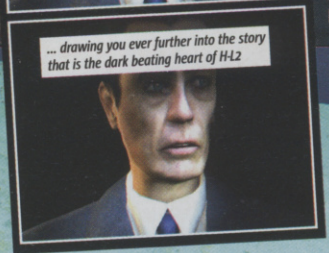
H-L2's revolutionary muscle system makes every character move like they're real, with stunning facial animation that portrays 35 facial expressions, conveying genuine emotions without the need to even speak! It looks more lifelike than ANYTHING we've ever seen before.



Gone are the days of single-boned mouths flapping out synch with the dialogue



Never before have games characters been so convincingly brought to life...



... drawing you ever further into the story that is the dark beating heart of H-L2

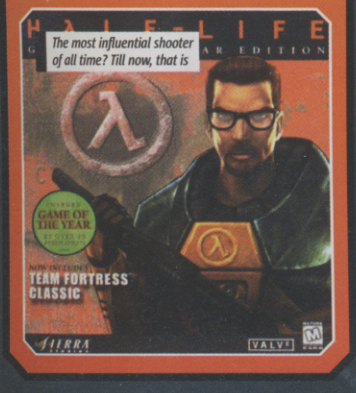
Any chance of a lift to Wimbledon mate? Er, oh, thought not

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

So why should you be getting so excited about this sequel then, hmm? Well, when Half-Life appeared five years ago, it did for the first-person shooter genre what Metal Gear Solid did for stealth games.

Set in the Black Mesa research complex, it oozed atmosphere like a burst dam, and wasn't only scary but ultra believable too, with intense action and a compelling plot, presented so seamlessly it sucked you in like a hyperventilating Dyson.

Also, if it hadn't been for H-L1, the world's fave online shooter, Counter-Strike, would never've been made. Unthinkable right? And with Half-Life 2 looking even more groundbreaking than Half-Life was in its time, do you really need any other reason to get clammy palmed? We thought not.



The most influential shooter of all time? Till now, that is

along patrol routes. Each step sends a shudder across the pavement and a shiver down your spine, as their legs move and fold in perfectly formed mechanical movements.

You approach a passing pedestrian to ask where the nearest boozer is – no idea. So you ask directions instead. Her face contorts, individual muscles twitching to betray a level of facial detail that no other game has ever even sniffed at. Man, this baby looks AMAZING. It's, like, the most lifelike game we've ever seen!

BIBLICAL PROPORTIONS

But quit gawping and listen up, she's got something to tell you. See, her look is one of fear. "Shhhh, they may hear us," she hisses before marching away. But why is she so afraid? How did these aliens get here? How did WE get here? And what's happened to us during the last ten years?

And that's how Half-Life 2 begins, sucking you from reality and plopping you straight into one of the most believable and beautifully realised virtual worlds ever.

Antlions and Antlion Guards are just two of the terrifying new enemies you'll be soiling yourself over

WORLD'S FIRST XBOX DETAILS

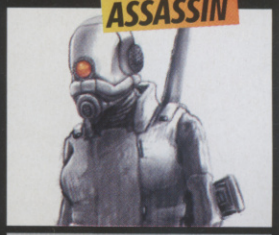
"Half-Life 2 isn't simply about being a lone hero – something you'll discover if you find yourself completely surrounded"

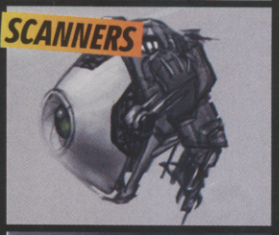
ALIEN INVASION

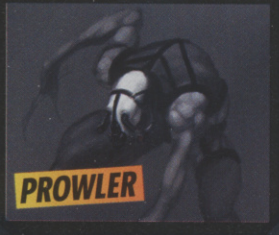
It's ten years after the end of Half-Life 1 and you find yourself in an Eastern European city called City 17. You've no idea of how you got there but at least the beer is cheap and the women are hot. Problem is, with the city teeming with pug-ugly aliens, watching tight-arsed honeys is the furthest thing from your mind.

In all, there'll be over fifty types of enemies for you to pit your wits against, including gargantuan thirty foot Striders – just like this one pictured here. They're armed with chain-guns and an energy weapon that cuts through concrete as if it's paper. And while Zombies, Barnacles and Face-Huggers will all be familiar to any Half-Life fan, the gruesome creatures in this sequel are far bigger, badder, uglier and more intelligent than before.

Also, rather than relying on scripted events like, say, Medal Of Honor, enemy actions depend on what you do and how you play. That means the gameplay possibilities will be almost limitless. Dribble, drool!







WOW, THAT'S HEV-Y

The HEV may look dorky, but it'll save your arse

Making a welcome return is the HEV Suit (Hazardous Environment Suit), which acts as body armour against bullets, radiation, explosions, and spat out pieces of gum on the pavement.

Exactly how you come across the HEV has yet to be revealed (we tried, honest), but our guess is that once you hook up with your buddies from Black Mesa, they'll provide one for you. And if they've seen fit to add some cool upgrades like boosters to help you jump further or run faster, then you won't hear us complaining. After all, that would just be childish. We want booster features now! Sorry.

VEHICULAR VANDALISM

When you're not disabling enemy attack vehicles by filling 'em with enough lead to start a pencil factory, you're also doing some driving yourself. In our playtest we had a violent shootout with dropships, which bobbed and weaved manically as we locked on to 'em with heat-seekers, drove a buggy and operated a crane!

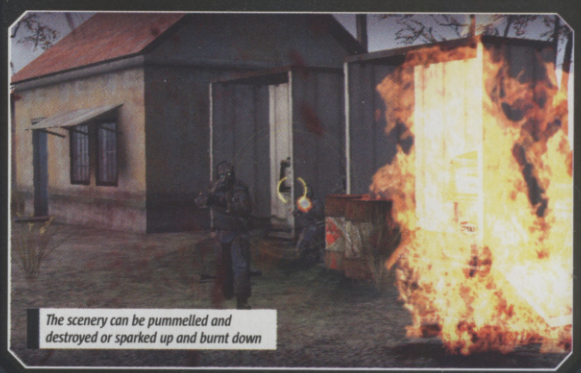
Thanks to Half-Life 2's hyper-real physics system, every vehicle handles and moves just like you'd expect them to in real life. And if you shoot cars in the fuel tank, they'll spark up like a firework factory. Burnt out vehicles are also useful for ducking behind in the middle of a firefight, their charred shells torn to shreds as bullets crack through rusted metal. More heavily armed enemies can even send these metal corpses dancing down the road or flying through the air like hulking metal ballerinas, only without the tights. Or the tutus.

Hit the fuel tank and watch those zombies fry

EASTERN CRUMBLING BLOCK

The game's architecture, believe it or not, plays a major role in Half-Life 2's subtext. Sub what, you say? Allow us to explain. Half the reason the game's been set in Eastern Europe is because it represents the clash between the new and the old. It's a setting which acts as a metaphor for the game's plot – contrasting with the aliens and their cutting-edge technology coming to earth and subjugating the weak species that is humanity. Clear?

No? Well if you don't give a toss about subtext (and frankly, neither do we), then you'll be pleased to know that every building is fully destructible, meaning shards of rock and stone will be scything through the air while you engage the enemy in bloody firefights as you and the rest of mankind attempt to take back City 17, street by street. Happy now?


The scenery can be pummelled and destroyed or sparked up and burnt down

UP THE ALIEN'S ARSENAL

While much of H-L2's weaponry has an uncanny resemblance to H-L1's, the new boys pack more punch than a pneumatic drill-mounted boxing glove.

Pick of the bunch is the Manipulator, which lets you to rip any object from the surrounding area and hurl it at your hapless enemies. It's also got an alternate fire mode, so you can shunt around heavy objects like cars to create makeshift barricades! An awesome new machine-gun that'll turn even the most heavily armed alien into a pile of finely ground dust also joins the arsenal (although a late bid from Manchester United did nearly scupper the deal).

You can also expect to dish out death with rocket-launchers, shotguns, MP5s, pistols, Colts, grenades and of course the now legendary crowbar, ideal for opening crates and most importantly of all, stoving in enemy heads and shells.

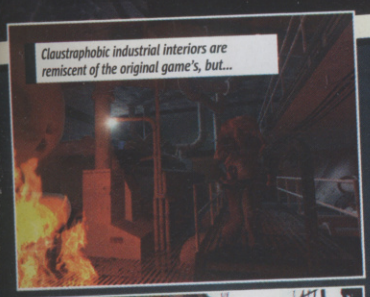
The rocket- launcher can lock onto aerial targets. Invaluable against these suckers

TAKE ME TO YOUR LEADER

In Half-Life you were a Lone Ginger Ranger from beginning to end. Half-Life 2, however, will see you fighting alongside and leading groups of AI allies into battle. Depending on their psychological makeup, each man will either choose to follow your orders or wuss-out and go off to find a safe place to curl up and cry.

However, if you're not into leading others you can play through the whole game without issuing a single order, as the AI can dynamically assess each situation and act accordingly. that said, wannabe brigade leaders amongst you will be relieved to know that you'll able to order your men to take cover, follow and back you up, or charge specific enemy-held areas. Glory Boys need not fret either, as the AI will always ensure you're the star of the show. Unless you're crap that is, in which case, you'll just be dead.

You can order allies around, but they may well chicken out


Claustraphobic industrial interiors are reminscent of the original game's, but...

...they're balanced with some impressively expansive and menacing exterior city locations

Wonder if Valve has secretly planned a late-level return to the alien homeworld too?

DIVINE INTERVENTION

But Half-Life 2 isn't simply all about being a lone hero – something you'll discover if, like us, you find yourself completely surrounded at this point. Jumping to our aid without any prompting, Father Grigory dishes out serious death and saves the day, before urging you to follow as he continues his charge through the dead men's dorm.

A barrel of explosives and a well-placed shotgun shell send broken zombie bodies flailing through the stinking night air, each one falling with a sickening thud in a broken-boned heap. You'll feel the urge to cackle madly as you walk past their burning carcasses!

And get this – this level is just the appetiser, a teasing morsel of mayhem, tantalising you like a greased up lapdancer looking for a big tip. Yup, the money shot is still to come, when you move onto the third level – as we found during our exclusive hands-on.

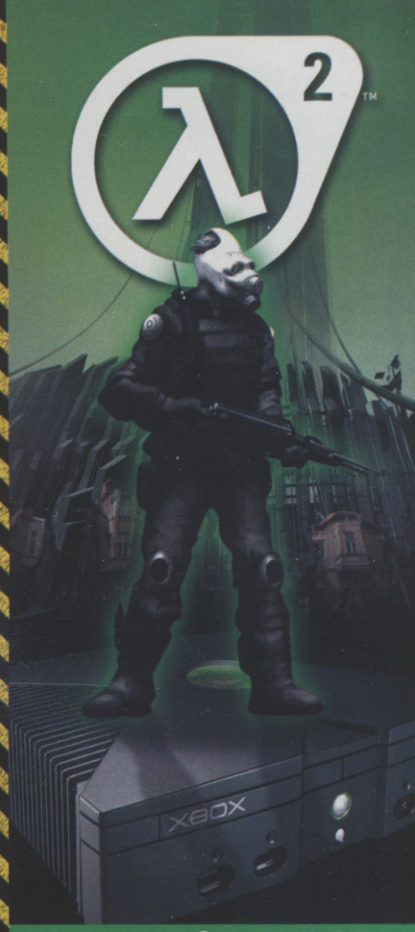
It begins with a speeding, bucking ride through scenic, rolling countryside. You're strapped into a buggy armed with machine-guns, heading towards a dry dock in the distance.

Once there, Half-Life 2's ultra-cool physics kicks in and you get to play around with a magnet-wielding crane, picking up vehicles and throwing them round like they're toy cars. When we were playing this bit, that was when it all REALLY kicked off.

GETTING PHYSICAL

Guards come piling out of nearby buildings, forcing you to dive behind crates. You peek up and unleashed some lead, causing your attackers to lunge for cover.

The firefight swings backwards and forwards like a horny dog latched onto its owner's leg. Countless enemies fall, their corpses crumpling in rigid heaps. But more are coming. Jumping back into the jeep, you stamp on the gas, »



WORLD'S FIRST
HALF-LIFE 2 XBOX DETAILS

During our Access All Areas tour of Valve's US offices, we uncovered some white-hot news that's more exciting than Stacey Keibler calling us up and offering to do a naked centrefold.

Yes, we can officially and exclusively confirm H-L2 really IS coming to the Xbox. Scratch that. H-L2 is ALREADY on Xbox. "We have it running on Xbox right now, but a decision on how and when we'll release it is reliant on our on-going conversations with Microsoft," reveals Valve's Managing Director, Gabe Newell.

But how will it compare to its PC cousin? Well, according to Gabe, the Xbox version will be identical to the PC one, only slightly inferior in the graphics department. So imagine the best looking PC game from 12 months ago – say Unreal II – and you'll be pretty close to how it'll look. In other words, it's still going to be one of if not THE best looking Xbox title ever. Better still, all of the PC version's facial animation, physics and musculature systems will be in there too!

It's also guaranteed to run more smoothly than a Porsche on rails, no matter how many aliens cram onto your TV. How? By fractionally reducing the detail level of each creature, so the mayhem continues uninterrupted. Sweet. As yet there's no release date, with the PC version shipping first. But one thing's for sure – Xbox ain't that far behind.

H-L 2. On Xbox! Oh god! Give it! Now!

A GIRL NAMED ALYX

Who's this fit bird then, eh? Her name's Alyx, your ally and guide throughout the course of Half-Life 2.

A talented scientist, as well as a one sexy little hottie, she's the daughter of Dr Eli Vance, a scientist from the first game. She's not just clever and hot, she's courageous too, mucking in when the action kicks off and helping you fill in the blanks from your decade-long amnesia during the game's more sedate periods. We like her. A lot.

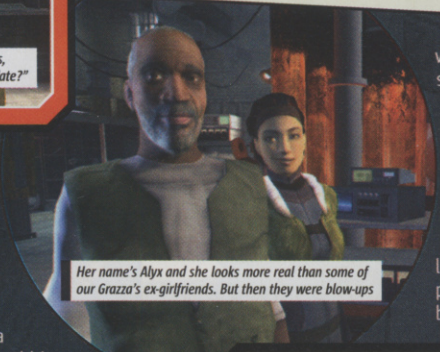
"Hi, my name's Alyx. I like killing alien freaks, playing around with cool gadgets . Wanna date?"

Don't get too close or he'll prod you with his big baton

"The hottest property this summer is burning a trail so bright you'll need shades to play it."

The settings are more stunning than a wet t-shirt competition sponsored by Johnson's baby oil

Propaganda broadcasts are commonplace in City 17



Her name's Alyx and she looks more real than some of our Grazza's ex-girlfriends. But then they were blow-ups

burning rubber and kicking up smoke as you charge through a nearby hanger and up a ramp towards a giant window.

LET'S ROCK 'N' ROLLER

As if in slo-mo, you launch off the ramp and through the window in a majestic flight of splintered glass and big air, flying over your hapless attackers before rejoining the ground and bouncing around more violently than Jordan's jugs on a rollercoaster.

Burning along the road, you hit turbo to clear a ravine, before being chased by an enemy dropship, its machine-guns biting into the road all around as you tried to outrun it. Failing, you hop out and lock on with a heat-seeking missile, gleefully watching as the cumbersome craft vainly bobs and weaves to avoid the winding explosive. Boom! Sayonara, sucker!

Speeding off, you head up a mountain and along winding roads, with only flimsy barriers blocking off vertigo-inducing drops. Suddenly, circular objects come rolling towards you. Roller Mines! Letting rip with the jeep's machine-gun, you send 'em pinging back against the barriers – but the goddamn things just keep on coming back. Bing! Brainwave! Jumping out of the car, you suck up the mines with the Manipulator and send 'em plummeting over the mountainside, where they hit the water with a distant puff of spray.

LET'S ROCK 'N' ROLLER

At this point, our playtest ended and, grudgingly, we had to sneak home to debrief you lot on all the skinny. Oh, and one final bit of good news: with the exception of the weapons – solid, satisfying, if a little overly similar to its predecessor's collection – we have to report there was little to criticise.

We have just a couple more months to go before the game ships and all you frenzied fraggers rip it apart like cakes at Celebrity Fit Club. We're busting to play it some more, but hey, after such a long time in the making, we can manage a bit longer. Clear your diary, 'cos the hottest property this summer is burning a trail so bright, you'll need shades on to play it. ✷

PREVIOUS GAMES

- Half-Life
- Counter-Strike
- Team Fortress
- Day Of Defeat
- CS: Condition Zero

HARD FACTS

- Characters can pull off 35 realistic facial expressions
- Every object has a physical property and can be manipulated
- Over 50 enemies
- Over 40 hours of gameplay
- AI reacts to your actions rather than vice-versa

DID YOU KNOW?

- More people play online Half-Life mod Counter-Strike than all of the other nine Top Ten online games put together!

FIRST PLAY, FIRST VERDICT

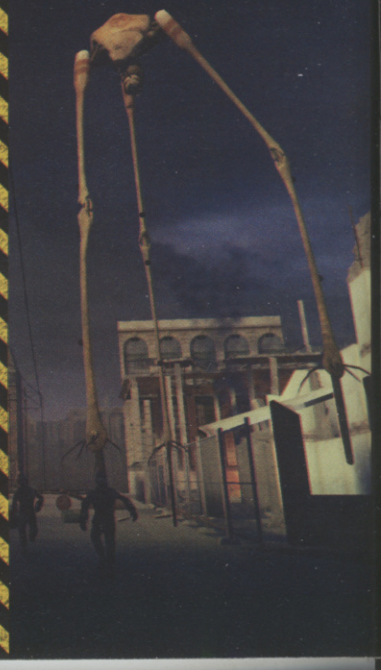
OUR MAN IN CITY 17, HE SAY: YESSSSSSS!

MARTIN KORDA

I've never been so blown away by a shooter in my life. The physics, muscle and facial animation systems alone make Half-Life 2 look light years ahead of everything else. And I mean EVERYTHING.

The AI, plot and graphics are awesome too. Vehicles handle with such realism, while the enemies have a real sense of scale and are genuinely terrifying – the 30-metre tall Striders will have you soiling your kecks in no time! Other shooters (Doom 3, that includes you) should be quaking (geddit?!) in their little booties at the prospect of squaring up to this one, and all of a sudden even the jaw-dropping, eyeball-popping Halo 2 is looking like its going to have major problems competing now that we know Half-Life 2 is coming to Xbox.

If it fulfils all its promise – and from what I've seen so far it will – this could well be the game that forever changes the way we look at shooters.



STREET FIGHTER

You and a squad of AI controlled allies are in the thick of the action in City 17. Busily dishing out death, you're making good progress with minimal casualties.

1 *Having seen off some enemies, it looks clear. Suddenly one of your men cries: 'Strider'*

2 *A huge war machine scatters your men, but one is caught and impaled by its gangly leg*

3 *Out of ammo, you use the Manipulator to pull chunks of the scenery from the world*

4 *You hurl 'em at the machine, only to see them bounce off ineffectually. Time to leg it!*

MY CREATURES WILL NEVER SURRENDER. KAIJUDO.

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COMPUTER & VIDEO GAMES CVG SPECIAL FEATURE

THE RUMBLE FISH

Atomiswave brings a Tsunami of COOL Coin-Ops!

ARCADES: THE REVENGE

Days are numbered for arcades as we knew them – places to lay your credibility on the line for a pocket's worth of silver change. Why feed coin-ops your cash, when the gaming goodness at home is the same or better?

Enter Atomiswave, the newest coin-op technology, created by Sammy to breath new life into a scene deserving at least this one more chance. Atomiswave offers games on a par with the best of Dreamcast (think Soulcalibur, House Of The Dead 2, and Power Stone), but costs arcade operators next to nothing to install.

It's a ROM-cart based system, meaning new games are easily installed, and has a changeable controller set-up. There'll be gun, tracker ball, fighting and shooting games – wherever there are cool new ideas there will be ways for Atomiswave to support them.

We've had an eye on Sammy's Sega-based hardware for a year. Now a handful of games are hitting the streets worldwide, so it's high time we got our hands dirty! It's mostly Sammy creating for Atomiswave, but support has been confirmed by SNK, (promising a new King Of Fighters dubbed Neowave), a new Metal Slug, and Samurai Spirits. Many Atomiswave games are planned for home release with GG Isuka scheduled for Japanese PS2 in July, but no confirmed dates for the UK. ✷

Garnet's tight skimpy outfit and incredible moves remind us of CVG's Tips Nurse! Go girl!

THE RUMBLE FISH

✷ BY: SAMMY/DIMPS ✷ PLAYERS: 1-2 ✷ TYPE: FIGHTING ✷ IN ARCADES: NOW

It looks old 2D, but The Rumble Fish is made in 3D with new gameplay and a cool roster of fighters boasting moves that get your pulse racing.

All the guys and stages are modelled in 3D, giving a cleaner image than sprite-based games. Plus fighters are not animated in the usual way, so movement is more natural.

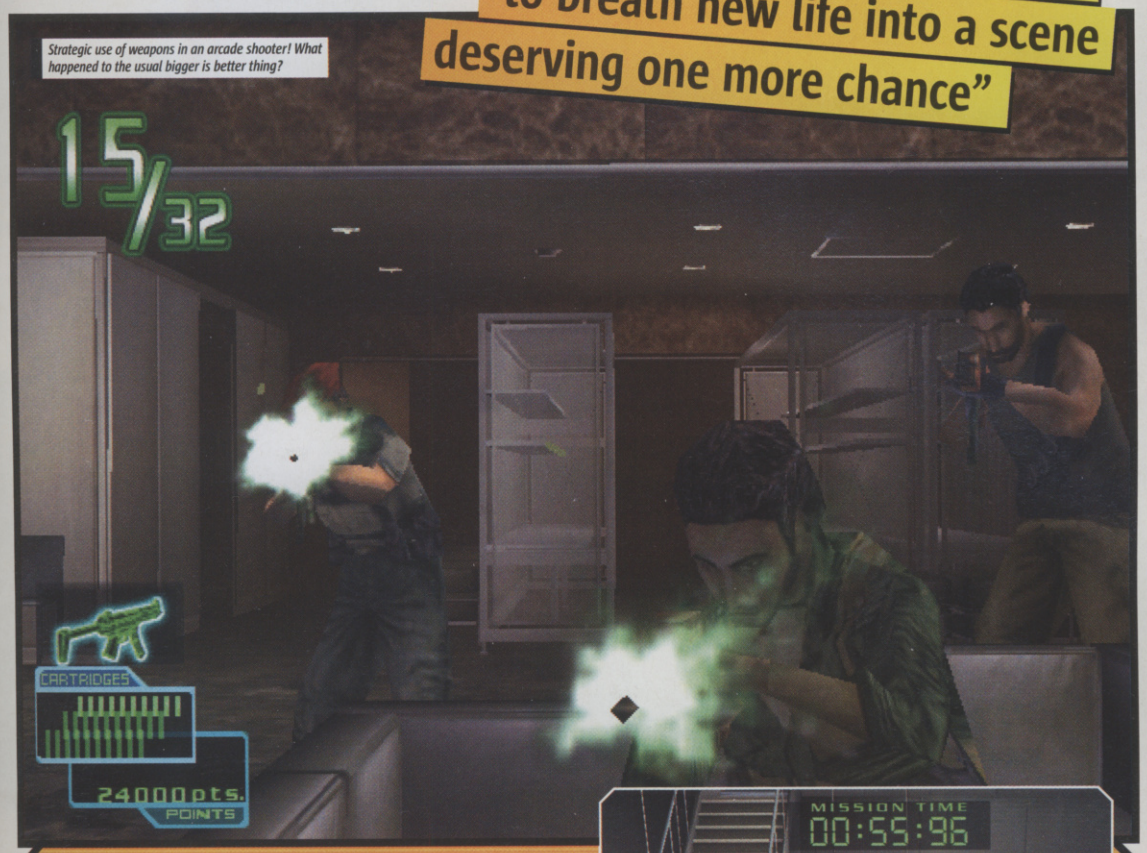
As well as the 2x punch and 2x kick buttons there's a dodge button which, if used correctly, can be followed by counter-attacks. There's also an adaptation of the Power Gauge meter, split between Offence and Defence, dubbed the Alternating Battle System. The Offence meter rises the more you attack, Defence increases the more you dodge or block. If both gauges are maxed, a Critical attack is possible – a super move that varies depending on your character.

The dodge button and ABS elevate The Rumble Fish into a tense mind reading game. Maybe Sammy/Dimps have struck gold with fight fans, while standing a great chance of attracting newcomers too.

With each round that your fighter continues undefeated, the more battered and torn he or she becomes. It's easy to spot the reigning champ

Chain combos, those which link normal moves in rapid succession, are an integral part of The Rumble Fish gameplay

"New coin-op technology created to breath new life into a scene deserving one more chance"



RANGER MISSION

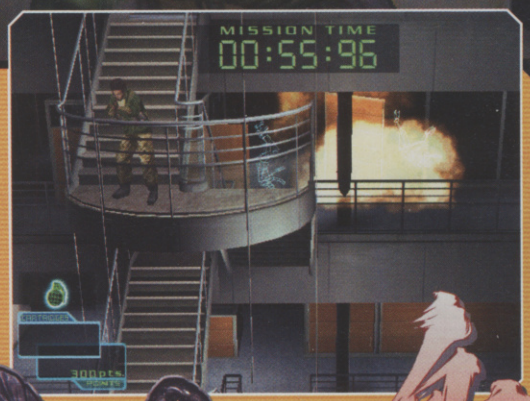
✷ BY: SAMMY ✷ PLAYERS: 1-2 ✷ TYPE: SHOOTING ✷ IN ARCADES: NOW

Hard edge military shooter, with graphics comparable to Time Crisis II. This gun game tests your reflexes in a refreshing variety of ways. In fact, if you remember Namco's crazy Point Blank series you'll have some idea of what to expect.

Like most gun games, your only task is to shoot, leaving the game to lead you from stage to stage. But Ranger Mission is unique in that you have specific orders for each mission.

There are standard 'shoot everything except the hostages' scenarios, but you're also required to shoot targets in sequence, disarm bombs, or sometimes take out larger enemy units such as tanks and helicopters. Have it!

We reckon Ranger Mission is going to be worth dropping at least a couple of quid into wherever you see it, especially if the place has the volume cranked up good and loud!



HALL OF FAME

- Chase 1929, Sammy, available now
- Demolish Fist, Sammy/Dimps, available now
- Dolphin Blue, Sammy, available now
- Force Five, Sammy, available now
- Guilty Gear X Version 1.5, Sammy/Arc Systems, 2004
- Guilty Gear Isuka, Sammy/Arc System Works, out now
- Knights Of Valour: The Seven Spirits, Sammy, out now
- Maximum Speed, Sammy, available now
- Metal Slug 6, SNK Playmore, TBC 2004
- Premium Eleven, Sammy/Dimps, available now
- Ranger Mission, Sammy, available now
- The Rumble Fish, Sammy/Dimps, May 2004
- Salaried Worker Golden Taro, Sammy, available now (JP)
- Sammy Vs Capcom, Sammy/Capcom, TBC 2004
- Samurai Spirits AW, SNK Playmore, TBC 2004
- Sports Shooting USA, Sammy, available now
- Sushi Bar, Sammy, available now (Japan)
- The King Of Fighters 2004, SNK Playmore, TBC 2004

DEMOLISH FIST

FORCE FIVE

SPORTS SHOOTING USA

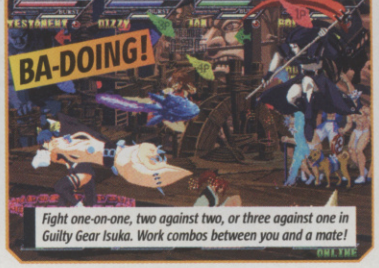
GUILTY GEAR ISUKA

✷ BY: SAMMY/ARC SYSTEMS ✷ PLAYERS: 1-4 ✷ TYPE: FIGHTING ✷ IN ARCADES: NOW

The Guilty Gear series has proven itself with a badass heavy metal attitude featuring ghouls and gorgeous babes. Its also had its fair share of innovative strategies, expanded once more in Isuka with a networked four-player system.

Isuka currently ranks among the top coin-ops in Japan, alongside King Of Fighters 2003 and long-term favourite Capcom vs SNK 2. One reason for this could be the use of Sammy's AW-NET, similar to Sega's VF Net for Virtua Fighter 4, offering nationwide ranking and exclusive downloads via the internet.

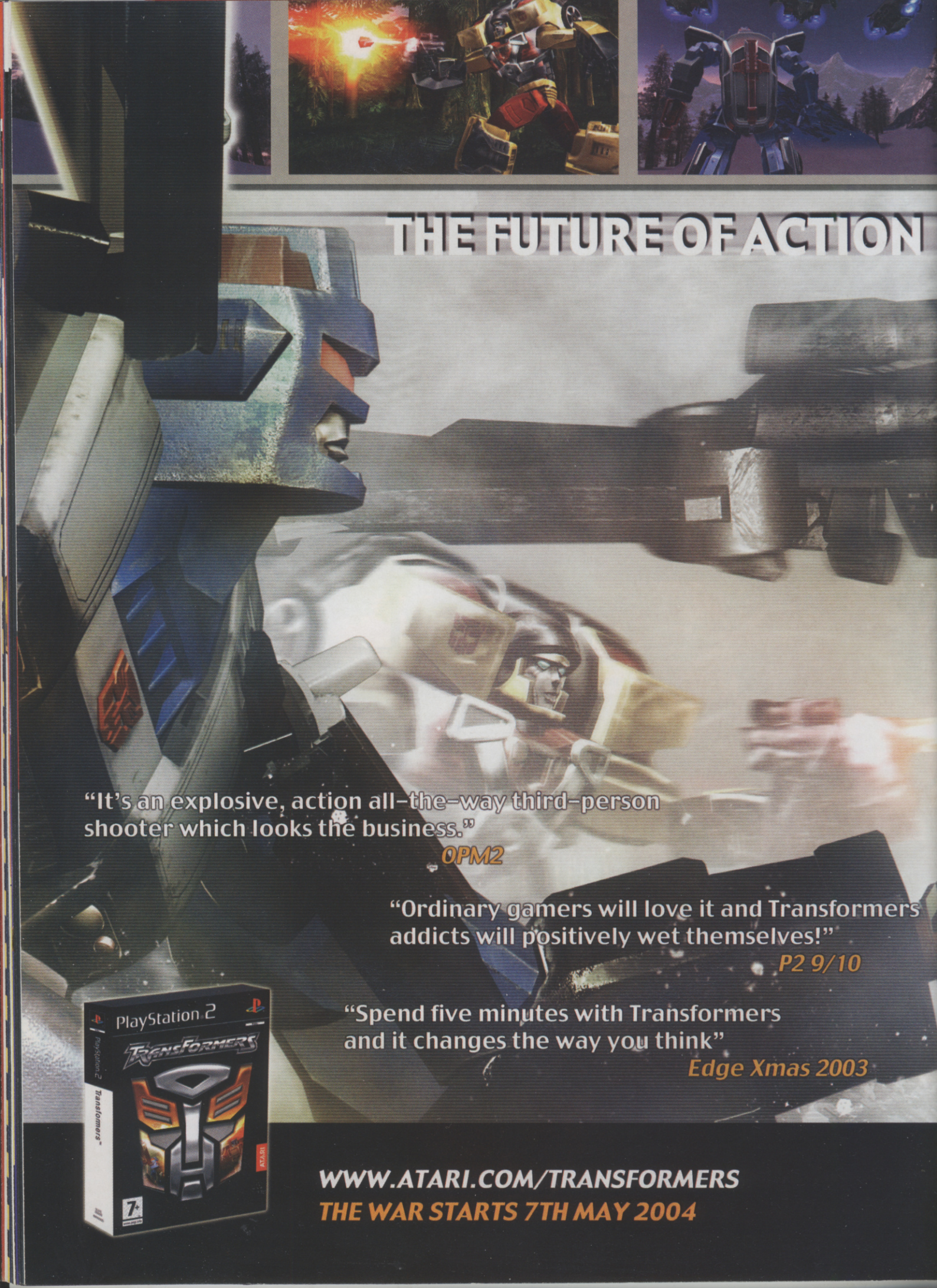
AW-NET is unlikely ever to make it to the UK, plus you'll need to find a larger venue to benefit from Atomiswaves linked up, though the standard one-on-one is still worth your coinage because of enhanced moves for all characters.



ATOMIS - UPDATES IN CVG

So much excitement is focused on what's new for home consoles, but we'd like to see some of that return to the world outside your bedroom.

We think Atomiswave deserves your attention with at least a few of its excellent games, and the promise of more on the way. Even today, it's still cool to compete within bigger social circumstances. So, see you down the arcade!


THE FUTURE OF ACTION
"It's an explosive, action all-the-way third-person shooter which looks the business."
OPM2
"Ordinary gamers will love it and Transformers addicts will positively wet themselves!"
P2 9/10
"Spend five minutes with Transformers and it changes the way you think"
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THE WAR STARTS 7TH MAY 2004

SHOOTERS IS COMING

"The graphics are stunning. In terms of ambition, no other PS2 game comes close."
Gamesmaster 88%

"The environments are truly lush, almost evocative of Halo on – yes – Xbox."
PSM2 March 2004

PlayStation 2

melbourne house

Licensing by: Hasbro Properties Group

ATARI

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INCOMING

ACCESS ALL AREAS TO THE FATTEST FORTHCOMING GAMES!

NOTHING FLIES UNDER THE CVG GAMES RADAR

Half-Life 2, eh? It's only the most important game ever, and we've got it first. But we're not just committed to exposing the games everyone's heard about – we also want to bring you the most honest opinions on the games that haven't made much noise yet.

That's why this month we're thrashing NFS Underground challenger Juiced, gutting blood-fest Monster Hunter, and getting Olympic with Athens 2004. Big wave-making games or tiddlers you've never heard of, if it's good it's in CVG.

Graeme Boyd

Graeme Boyd *Team CVG*

HOW CVG'S PREVIEWS WORK

CVG's reviews are the most accurate, informative and downright honest you'll ever read. Here's why...

CVG VERDICT BOX

THE BEST PICS
See just how good (or bad!) the game looks with CVG's sweet-as Kylie's bum screenshots. Woo-ee!

INFO OVERLOAD
What it's like to play, how it compares to other games and whether it's any good

ONLINE GAMING
Can you play the game online, against other gamers around the globe? Find out here

RELEASE DATE, PUBLISHER AND DEVELOPER
When it's due out, and who's making it.

PLAYERS
How many people can play. If it's anything from one to 32, we'll put 32!

CVG OPINION
What we thought of the game, no matter what stage of development the game is at

WE LOVE
The good things we like about the game so far

WE HATE
The things we'd really like the developers to avoid including in the final game

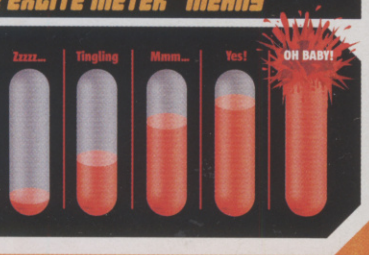
FORMAT
The console we played the game on is highlighted red, but other formats it's coming out on are listed too!

WEBSITE
Want more info, more screens and to see it in action? Visit this URL!

IN A NUTSHELL
A brief summary of what the game is like. If it's an update and CVG has already previewed it we'll also sum up stuff we've said before

WHAT THE EXCITE METER™ MEANS

You can tell how excited CVG's experts are about the game being previewed simply by looking at the Excite Meter! Easy, huh?



Races are held on closed streets. It lacks the tension of NFS Underground, but lets you concentrate on racing

CVG SMOKIN' SCREENS! + ANOTHER EXCLUSIVE FIRST PLAY!

Juiced

* PUBLISHER ACCLAIM
* DEVELOPER JUICE GAMES
* OUT: SEPTEMBER 3

ONLINE GAMING x4

IN A NUTSHELL

Souped-up street racing screamer that takes the NFS Underground chassis and maxes it out with 47 licensed motors from 17 manufacturers, hundreds of mods from 55 licensed brands and a huge urban area to burn up. It's that good.

AVAILABLE ON

XBOX

ALSO ON

PS2, PC

WWW.ACCLAIM.COM

Quiz: you see a clapped-out VW Golf Mk. 1 puttering down the high street.

Do you: A) Think to yourself 'That looks like a rusty turd but if it gets me where I'm going it's cool.' Or B) Have a lusty desire to slap on some VeilSide skirts, stick in some Koni springs and Recaro seats, bolt on a triple-winged spoiler, and paint the whole thing pearlescent lime green?

If you chose B and just the prospect of it has got your own suspension stiffening, then Juiced'll have you gushing high octane love oil all over your Recaros. If you chose A... what are you on about? Piss off and read about Barbie Horse Adventures or something.

Actually, don't. Even if you think skirts are just something girls wear and modding is something fat men do to Half-Life, we reckon Juiced can educate you in the ways of the boy racer.

MOD FOR IT

The reason we're juiced about Juiced is that it's the logical extension of NFS Underground. In car modding terms it's taken Underground's frame, weight-reduced and turbo-charged it, then stuffed it so full of nitrous oxide it's farting flames.

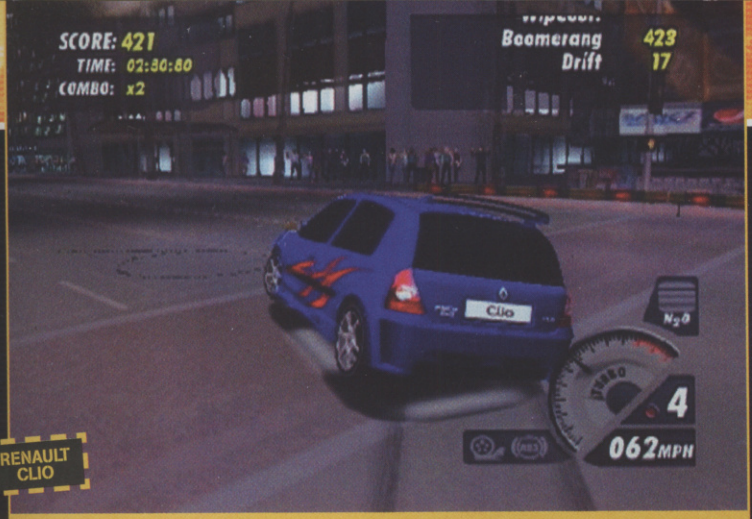
Not that Underground didn't have some serious horsepower to start with. The modding stuff was wicked but after a while it felt a little restrictive. The unlockable extras were tied into the game structure, so as you progressed you ended up with a car that looked and performed like your mate's. True boy racers want to customise every last inch of their street-burning baby. That's where Juiced rolls in.

There are 47 officially licensed motors from 17 manufacturers like Honda, Nissan, Fiat, and Dodge. You can buy scabby second-hand dingers and splash out on upgrades, or sick all your cash on a

Cornering has to be much more considered than in NFS Underground and crashes cost you dear – in time and money

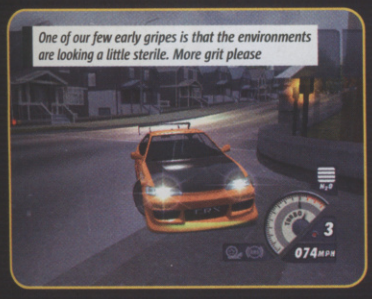
As you soup up your car it'll get plastered with sponsor's decals to show what you're running

"WHEELS SPIN AND TRACTION HEADS FOR THE HILLS WHERE EVERYONE DRIVES FIAT PANDAS TO CHURCH"

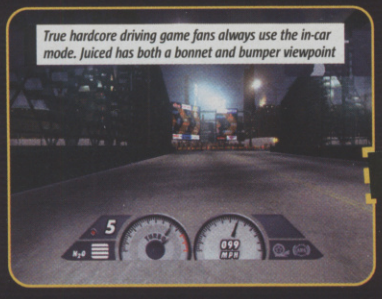


Kerbing your motor will bounce you into the air, bugger up your traction, and knacker your alloys

You can fit nitrous for that kick-ass burst of insane acceleration. And the road glows red in a magic way



One of our few early gripes is that the environments are looking a little sterile. More grit please



True hardcore driving game fans always use the in-car mode. Juiced has both a bonnet and bumper viewpoint

One crew's even got a huge oval stadium on their turf. It's perfect for opening up the big boys

factory fresh model that looks and smells sweeter than Britney's undercrackers.

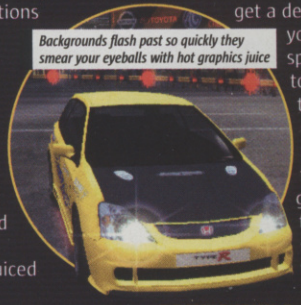
ALLOY KIT A LOT

Then there's the hundreds of cosmetic and performance parts licensed from 55 huge brands in the car modding scene. Alloys, neon lights, roof vents, induction kits, lowering springs, nitrous, carbon bonnets, headlight brows... whatever. If you've seen it in Max Power it's in Juiced.

And colours? Juiced's got colours. There's three layers to play with, full customisation over mix of paint, and even flippy pearlescent paint that makes your motor look like a hologram on wheels. If you do the math we're talking about 500,000 totally unique car set-ups, and if you factor in the colour options you can add another zero on to that. Trick? Trick.

At this point you're either bored or bricking your load at the car customising opportunities. Either way, you're about to get the purest hit of car modding methadone Juiced has to offer.

Every modification in Juiced has a cost, weight and performance relative to real life. Once you've tricked out your ride you can stick it on the game's rolling road, floor it, and get a detailed graph displaying your max power output, speed, fuel efficiency and torque. It's so accurate that you could create a replica of your own (or your dad's) car and get the same readouts in the game as down Kwik-Fit. If that doesn't ignite your spark plug we don't know what will.



Backgrounds flash past so quickly they smear your eyeballs with hot graphics juice

DRIVES LIKE A DREAM

Okay, but how does it drive? Like a carbon-fibre, rocket-propelled, razor's-edge dream. Not bad, then. It's not straight-up arcadey like NFS. It's just as fast and intense, but mainlined with a fuel injection of Project Gotham's oversteer and Gran Turismo's reactiveness.

When we first got our hands on the pad we chose a meaty Dodge Viper, and promptly walloped it into every Armco, barrier and pedestrian in sight. These cars are mean bastards and they won't hesitate to launch you into a tree if you stamp on their accelerators without some automotive foreplay.

Wheels spin, tyres burn out, and traction packs its bags and heads for the hills where everyone drives Fiat Pandas to church. But just like Gotham, GT3 and Driv3r, keeping tyre grip on a tight leash is the joy of the experience. Rein it in to dive through an inside line, and unleash it to peel a steaming layer off the tarmac.

CRUISIN' FOR A BRUISIN'

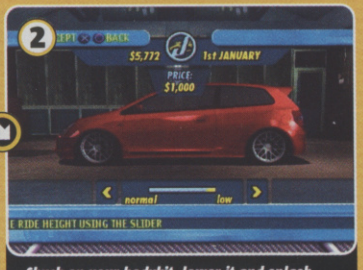
And when you get into Juiced's cruising scene you'll need to set traction free

MOD HOUSE

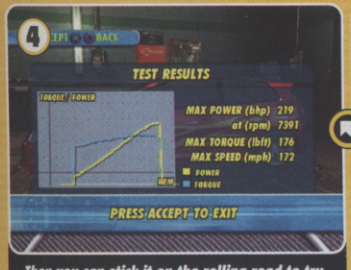
Juiced is really pushing its expanded modding capabilities – it wants you to choose exactly how your car looks and performs and lavish it with more care and attention than a hot, needy girlfriend.

There are more modification options than in NFS Underground, and the developers are putting emphasis on each upgrade having a realistic influence on your car, in both positive and negative terms.

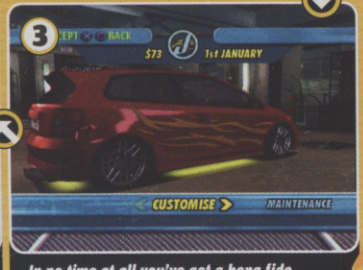
Start off with a basic production car. You can buy cheap second-handers to fix up



Chuck on your bodykit, lower it and splash some decals on the side...



Then you can stick it on the rolling road to try out the performance. It's nerdy but it's GOOD



In no time at all you've got a bona fide, hot-ride street racer. Costs a bit though

ON FIRE ONLINE

The official announcement of the multiplayer features will be made at E3, but we've seen enough of the game to have a pretty good idea of what to expect.

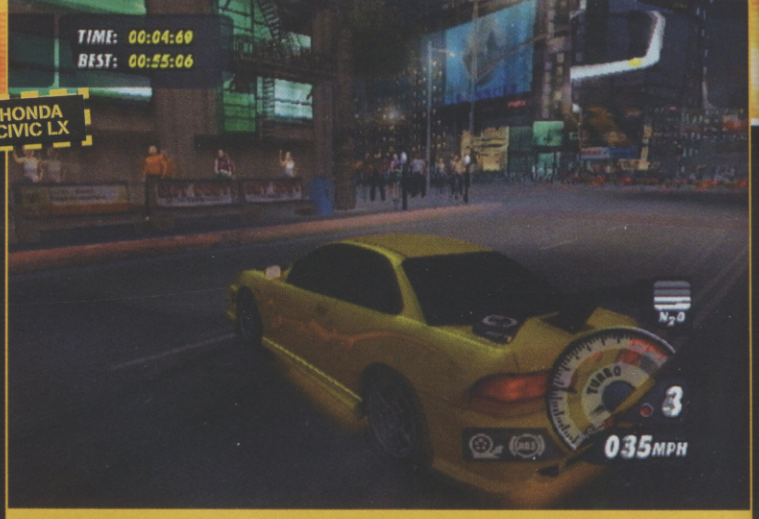
Think Gotham 2, but instead of just choosing your car and paintjob you'll be able to customise every last inch and show off online! And with Juiced's crew-based structure, we reckon virtual car communities, with rivalries and allegiances within, will be able to flourish. Could be truly awesome.

Okay, picture the scene. You've worked on your car for ages like it was in your dad's drive. It rocks. You take it online...

No one else ANYWHERE will have the same set-up as you. Your car is unique. You meet up for a race or a cruise...

Impress someone and they might ask you to join their online crew. Get a big enough rep and they'll join you...

All the fun of real-life car communities without the minging girls and Burger King car-parks...



Powerful motors require gentle handling. Juiced is going to feel great with a Force Feedback wheel

CAR IN THE COMMUNITY

Just like real underground car cruises and street races, everything in Juiced is organised by mobile phone. You start off with only your mum's number but as you build a rep, the calls start coming in.

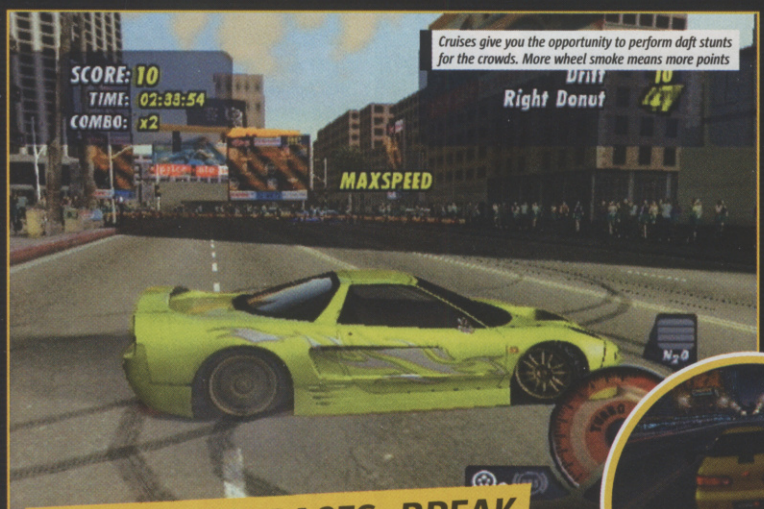
Other crews will get in touch to invite you to races and cruises where you can fleece 'em real good.

Plan your domination in the Calendar screen. It shows all upcoming meets and entry costs

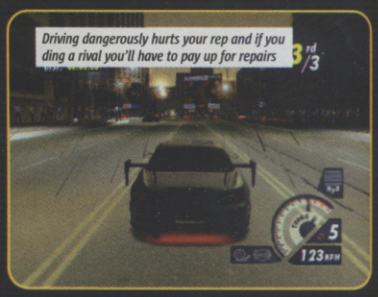
Based in schizo Californian landscapes, there are nine areas, each with a ruling crew

The handbrake reacts realistically. Pull on it too long and you'll be thrown out of control

This motor's mint but mods will drop off with punishment and you'll have to pay to replace them



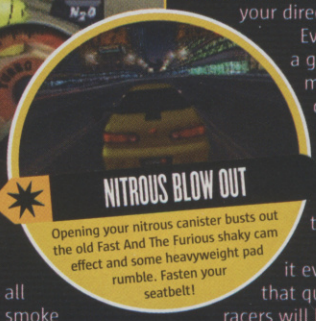
Cruises give you the opportunity to perform daft stunts for the crowds. More wheel smoke means more points



In Arcade mode you can randomly mod-up your motor for some instant street smarts

"BET BIG ON RACES, BREAK OFF SOME HOT MOVES AND YOUR REP GOES UP"

like a wild beast. This is the equivalent of Underground's Drift Racing – it's just you, your motor, and a time limit in which you'll have to thrash out as many donuts and handbrake turns as you can. Wipeout and you'll earn the invoice for a respray and a new bodykit. Score big and you'll earn mad respect.



NITROUS BLOW OUT

Opening your nitrous canister busts out the old Fast And The Furious shaky cam effect and some heavyweight pad rumble. Fasten your seatbelt!

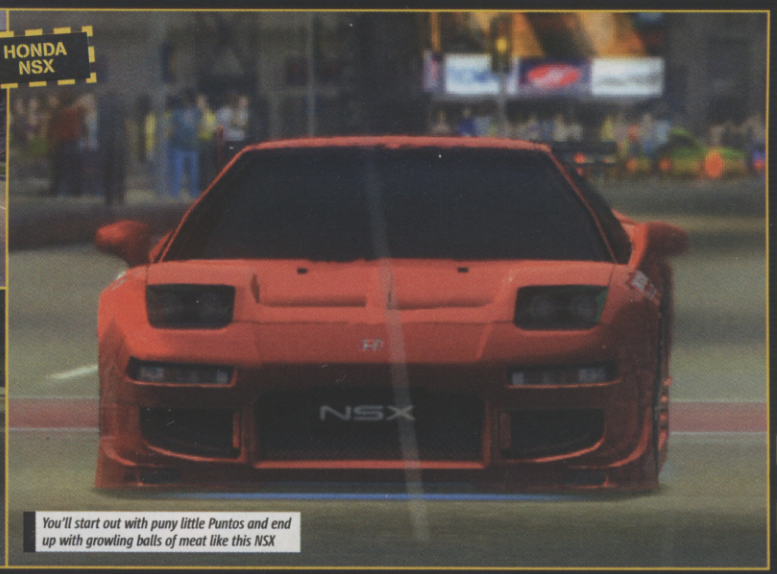
That's what Juiced is all about. Bet big on races, smoke your opponents, break off some hot moves and your rep goes up. Bugger up and you'll lose cred, then lose cash fixing up your scuffed motor. Other crews will invite you to races and cruises in their part of town. Keep your rep growing and racers will join your crew, bringing their cars, their cash, and their allegiance. You can enter races with your mates and order them to drive as you see fit, to keep the cash headed in your direction.

Eventually you'll have a garage stocked with modified motors and a pool of expert drivers you can enter into events. It's like being the boss of your very own street racing team with the potential to rule the scene.

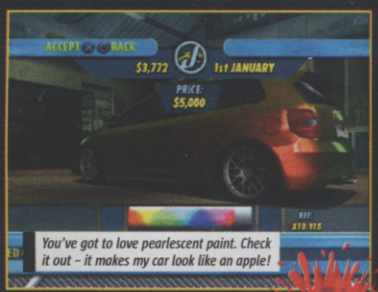
And you'll be able to do it even if you answered A to that question at the top. Casual racers will love the on-point driving and the Underground-skinning car customisation. But if you're a true-blue boy racer you'll relish the in-depth range of motors and tune-ups, the obscenely accurate performance and the hardcore physics. Need For Speed better check its wing mirrors and see what's flying up – Juiced could own the Underground. ✷

Customising your dials is the kind of touch we love. You can make them pink if you want

We're eager to see if Juiced will really let us live out our boy racer fantasies better than Underground



You'll start out with puny little Puntos and end up with growling balls of meat like this NSX

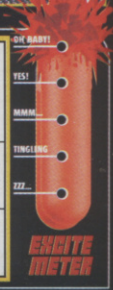


You've got to love pearlescent paint. Check it out – it makes my car look like an apple!

CVG OPINION Souped-up, maxed-out racing with a basis in the real car modding community means it could smoke NFS Underground. We're excited. **Graeme**

WE LOVE
- Loads of licensed motors and mods
- Damage model that makes you pay
- The rep system should be cool

WE HATE
- Powerful cars are a little too jumpy
- No pedestrian traffic
- Lacks NFS's slick polish



METAL SLUG 3

* PUBLISHER
TBC (SNK IN US)
* DEVELOPER
PLAYMORE
* OUT:
TBC

ONLINE GAMING

IN A NUTSHELL

This is perhaps one of the last new 2D side-scrollers you'll ever see, with demented enemies and endless, thumb-shredding bullets. It's no Halo 2, but even the dedicated could have tough work clearing this one out.

AVAILABLE ON

XBOX

WWW.SNKPLAYMORE.JP/CONSUMER/EN_PLAYSTATION2.HTML#MS3

You think you're hard. You wear your Arsenal kit in the Man Utd stands. You shout "Bomb!" at the airport just for kicks. But how about racing through half a dozen levels of old-skool arcade mayhem with naught but three measly lives? Metal Slug 3 promises to catapult thrill-seekers back to 1992, when arcade games still made money and twitchy side-scrollers ruled.

Since anyone with a gob of brains can grab MAME on their PC and fire up Metal Slug classics, SNK has done a little bit more than recreate the 2D arcade release. Six primary missions may not sound like a lot, but they're huge, and damn difficult too. Once the arcade challenge is completed, two bonus stages await, and Xbox Live leaderboards broadcast your skills to the world. The pace is as frantic as a steroids-fuelled sprinter's pulse; and your fingers will need to work like lightning.

TWO DIMENSIONS IS ALL YOU GET

So far, everything that defines the series is in place: ludicrous enemies, imaginative side-scrolling, multiple pathways and a total absence of plot. Mutated devil crabs, giant eels named Martha and hippy POWs abound, and that's just the first stage! (It's worth noting the abundance of soldiers to rescue – 1040 to be precise.) The arcade standard should be joyously upheld, so expect a verse/chorus/verse structure with varied stages, and multiple gargantuan bosses, like your favourite rock song cranked up to 11.

You can commandeer all kinds of military vehicles and run rampage across the levels

A garage full of new vehicles is in place, too, though this is no Grand Theft, er, Slug. Instead you simply commandeer gear like the Slug Sub and oddball Elephant Slug whilst traversing each level. Vehicle usage stats, along with stuff like kill ratios and completion time, will all be part of the data uploaded to the online boards for public view. Beats entering 'ass' on the high score board down the local, that's for sure. ✷

FROM OUT OF THE PAST

This view was once commonplace for gaming. Before multi-million dollar PS2 adverts, and graphic scenes of violence and destruction, folks queuing up to shed their ten pence pieces was simply the best game advertising ever got.

It's a sad thing to see in decline, so hopefully Metal Slug can hold the classic banner high.

A title change was necessary when Spielberg rejected Raiders of the Mutant Insectoid Ark

Chase the planes! Avoid gunfire! Mash enemies! Everything about this game rules

The riveting story of a man and his camel

When good fungi turn bad, avoid the deadly spores

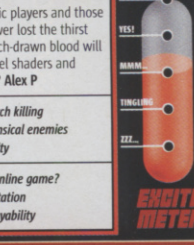
We're not sure what's scarier – the giant bugs, the guy with the mad beard, or the marine's sweatband

CVG OPINION

Nostalgic players and those who never lost the thirst for twitch-drawn blood will eat it up. Who needs pixel shaders and bump-mapping anyway? **Alex P**

WE LOVE
- *Old-timey twitch killing*
- *Utterly nonsensical enemies*
- *Insane difficulty*

WE HATE
- *Where's the online game?*
- *Low-fi presentation*
- *Light on replayability*



KONAMI

Destiny has chosen YOU to duel again.

The official game for the Yu-Gi-Oh! World Championship 2004.

The Yu-Gi-Oh! World Championship 2004 will be held in Los Angeles this summer. Discover how you can be part of it. Check out

www.konami-europe.com/wct2004

GAME BOY ADVANCE

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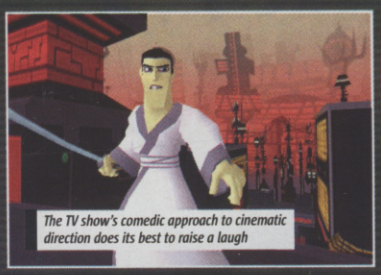
LICENSED BY Nintendo

SAMURAI JACK
THE SHADOW OF AKU


The TV show's comedic approach to cinematic direction does its best to raise a laugh

* PUBLISHER
SEGA EUROPE
* DEVELOPER
AMAZE ENT
* OUT:
JUNE

ONLINE GAMING

IN A NUTSHELL

One of CVG's top Cartoon Network heroes in a suitably lunatic but somehow classy videogame cash-in. It's a straightforward action adventure, a dumb-ass Ninja Gaiden aimed both at kids and big kids like us.

AVAILABLE ON

PS2

ALSO ON

XBOX, GC

WWW.SEGA.COM/GAMESITE/SAMURAIJACK

Jack's bow topples the beetles so that he can jump up high to spear their soft bellies. Don't get too close, as they spit poison!

What are the odds that you need to wait for his axe to fall before hitting him from behind? That chopper could make sushi out of Jack

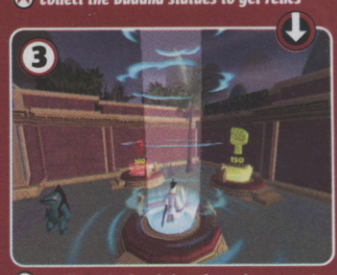
SWORD OF DESTINY

This game is all about prepping Jack for his final confrontation with Aku, the bug-like volcano god from the TV show.

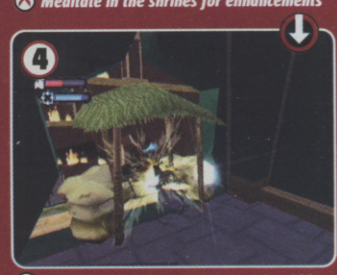
To this end Jack searches for relics, to be exchanged for health, power and Zen. He must also rescue enough innocent citizens to be granted magical powers for his sword.

Scrolls teach Jack new Super Moves

Collect the Buddha statues to get relics



Meditate in the shrines for enhancements



Slay Aku's henchmen wherever they hide

An ancient CVG proverb says, "Licensed game, never good." Although it's not possible to find truly terrible licensed games anymore, the majority are bad and a pitiful few are above average.

So, you might blame us for approaching Samurai Jack with negativity, but that would be like shaming a war veteran for jumping at loud noises. We brandish our scathing katana for the purposes of this preview with pride. Let's see if Jack has the smarts to parry our best blows.

STRENGTH FROM WITHIN

Sure enough this looks set to be a by-numbers action adventure. The game makes good use of samurai swordplay, borrowing techniques from blade warriors such as Onimusha and Tenchu. Jack leaps high into the air to spike giant beetles, and uses Sakai (slow-mo) combos to cut a swathe through groups of villains. This sort of thing mirrors the TV show pretty well, and the overall presentation style is clean and refreshing too. What's missing, though, is the humour found in the contrast between Jack and his madcap foes.

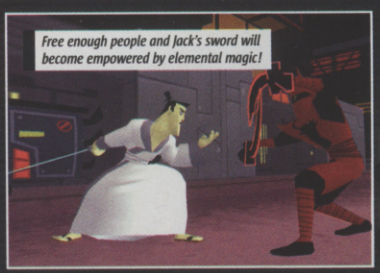
Exaggerated camera direction is worked into scenes wherever possible to remind us that this is supposed to be goofball entertainment. For our money, though, we haven't encountered anything as violently funny as in the cartoon. You need Jack to be surrounded by chaos to highlight his ridiculously Zen approach to adversity.

Instead what's on offer is a Samurai Jack themed quest, pseudo-Zelda switch-kicking and lock-picking taking you onto deeper, darker dungeons. Progress and pacing is almost entirely non-threatening, although we're sure it gets trickier in the latter of the 24 levels.

We're not totally hating this sim-Samurai Jack-ulator. It's a slick production that ought to be worth at least a weekend's rent from SJ aficionados, who'll also appreciate the input of original artists, voice actors, and the music composer from the series. Just don't expect it to give Onimusha or Ninja Gaiden a run for their Yen.

One of Aku's more menacing henchmen favours two sabres versus Jack's katana

An enhanced sword and lots of armour for protection gives Jack a fighting chance

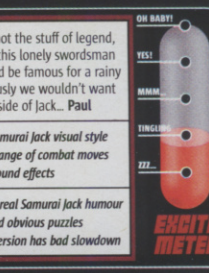

Free enough people and Jack's sword will become empowered by elemental magic!

CVG OPINION

It's not the stuff of legend, but this lonely swordsman could be famous for a rainy CVG weekend. Obviously we wouldn't want to get on the wrong side of Jack... **Paul**

WE LOVE
- Distinct Samurai Jack visual style
- A decent range of combat moves
- Comedy sound effects

WE HATE
- Lacking in real Samurai Jack humour
- Simple and obvious puzzles
- Preview version has bad slowdown



LEGENDS OF WRESTLING SHOWDOWN

- PUBLISHER: ACCLAIM
- DEVELOPER: ACCLAIM STUDIO AUSTIN
- OUT: JUNE/JULY

ONLINE GAMING | x4

IN A NUTSHELL

Legends of Wrestling reunites the finest wrestlers of the 70s, 80s and 90s for body-breaking mayhem. Showdown is the third in the series, and the new developer has revamped the gameplay and graphics.

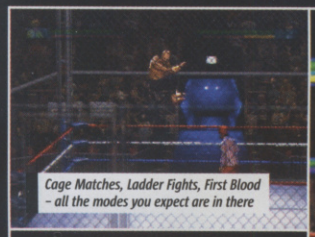
AVAILABLE ON

PS2

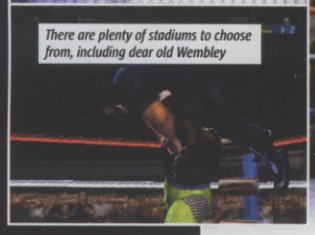
ALSO ON

XBOX, PC

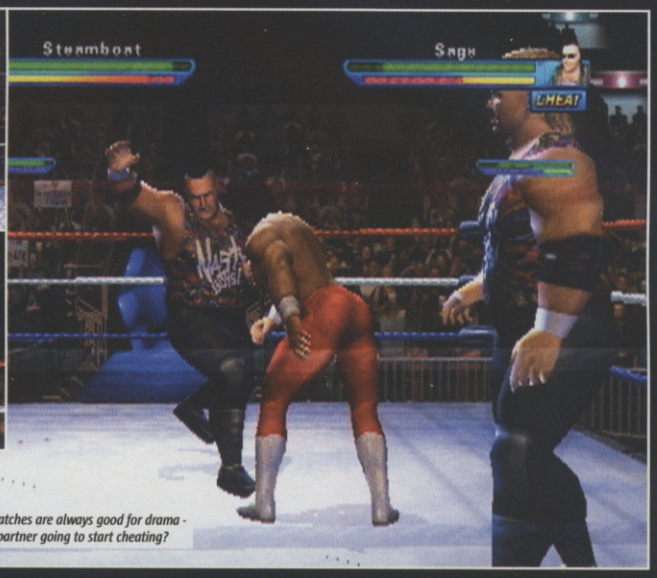
WWW.LEGENDSSHOWDOWN.COM



Cage Matches, Ladder Fights, First Blood – all the modes you expect are in there



There are plenty of stadiums to choose from, including dear old Wembley



Tag team matches are always good for drama - when's the partner going to start cheating?

It's hard to imagine that there'll come a time when nobody knows who The Rock is anymore. But then how many people know who the hell 'Rowdy' Roddy Piper (star of Wrestlemania I in 1985) is these days?

Well, Hot Rod is just one of the motley crew of wrestling superstars of yesteryear to be found in Showdown: Legends Of Wrestling.

BACKSEAT PILEDRIVER

There's no doubt that the Legends Of Wrestling series has had to accept a backstage seat to the WWF/E wrestling games in past years. LOW titles have lacked the visual polish, the slick gameplay and the extensive line-up of today's wrestlers that the official titles have in spades.

But with new developers, brushed up visuals, plus revamped gameplay and controls, just maybe Showdown can turn the clock back and restore its roster of white-trash warriors to centre stage.

The weasly little guy is the The Grand Wizard – one of wrestling's finest ever managers

Although they're still ironing out bugs and glitches, it all looks pretty fine at the moment – certainly a great deal better than earlier efforts. The animations of the throws, arm-locks and piledrivers look flashy, and the big fight atmosphere is intense.

TRAILER TRASH

The line up of old talent involved is also pretty impressive, with a whole trailer park full of spandex-clad has-beens in store – some 73 wrestlers as it stands. Each gets his own signature entrance, which should please wrestleheads. Sadly, they don't receive unique signature moves though.

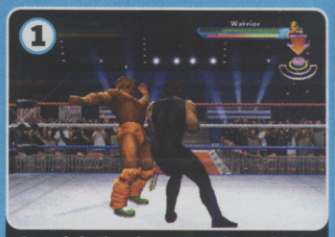
All the game modes you'd expect are there (Hardcore, Table Match etc) though, and there are enough multiplayer tag-team and free-for-all modes to keep a crotch-grabbing crowd happy for days.

While it's too early to say whether Showdown will seriously threaten WWE's stranglehold over videogame grappling, you can start getting excited if you're old enough to still remember with fondness when the likes of Hulk Hogan, Terry Funk and Ricky Steamboat were the world's highest paid tubby rednecks. ✷

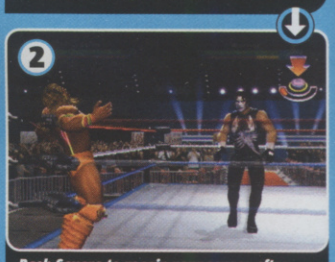
MASS BRAWL

The new 'ready to brawl' control system revolves around three buttons – X is used to punch or kick, O to grapple, and Square to pick your ass, erm no, block and counter.

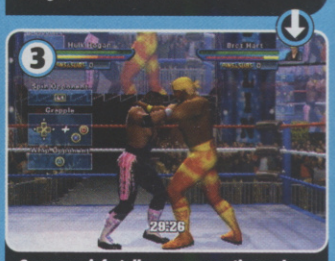
In conjunction with the left analog stick and the shoulder buttons, your obese on-screen obliterator will be performing such time-honoured acts of brutality as the Irish Whip, the Pescado and the Piledriver.



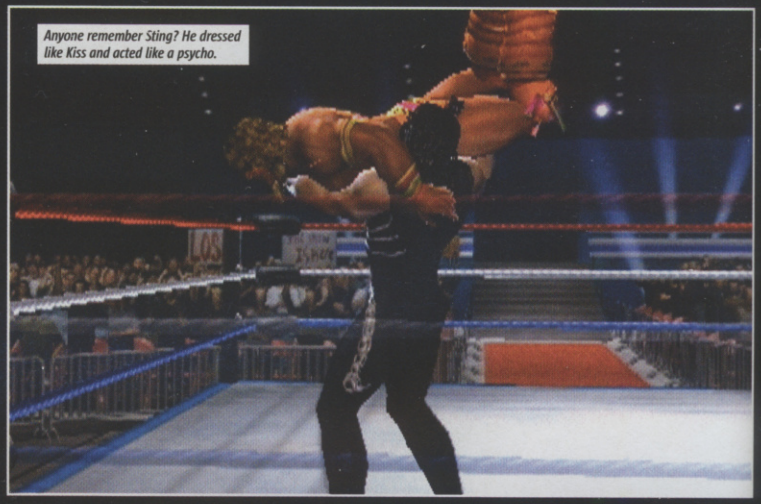
Controls in Showdown are easier to pick up than previous Legends titles



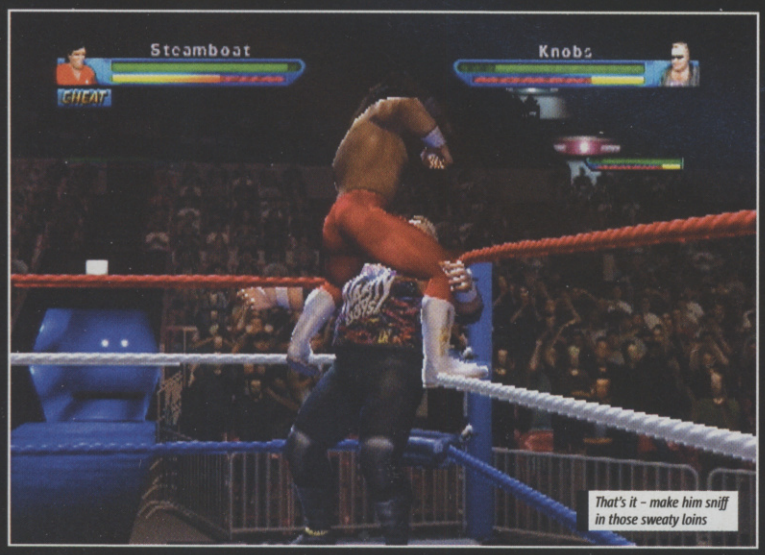
Bash Square to regain your senses after being booted in the head



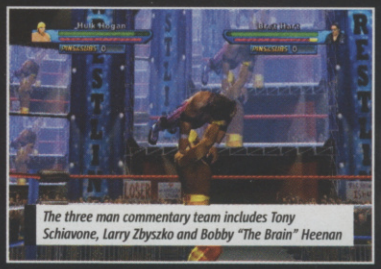
On screen info tells you your options when you've got your opponent in a lock



Anyone remember Sting? He dressed like Kiss and acted like a psycho.



That's it – make him sniff in those sweaty loins



The three man commentary team includes Tony Schiavone, Larry Zbyszko and Bobby "The Brain" Heenan

CVG OPINION

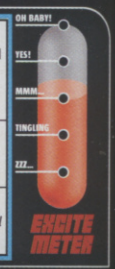
With its improved visuals, extended fighter roster, and slicker controls, Showdown has got the best chance of any Legends game yet to take WWE's title. **Steve O**

WE LOVE

- Some of the finest wrestlers ever
- New, easy to use control system
- On-screen advice is dead handy

WE HATE

- No signature moves for wrestlers
- Often feels manic and out of control
- No current Superstars in there



THE X-FILES: RESIST OR SERVE

- PUBLISHER VIVENDI
- DEVELOPER BLACK OPS
- OUT: NOW

ONLINE GAMING

IN A NUTSHELL

Based on series seven, Resist Or Serve is the first ever X-Files game where you get to play as both Mulder and Scully. Each character has a different story to play through, with zombies and aliens all over the place.

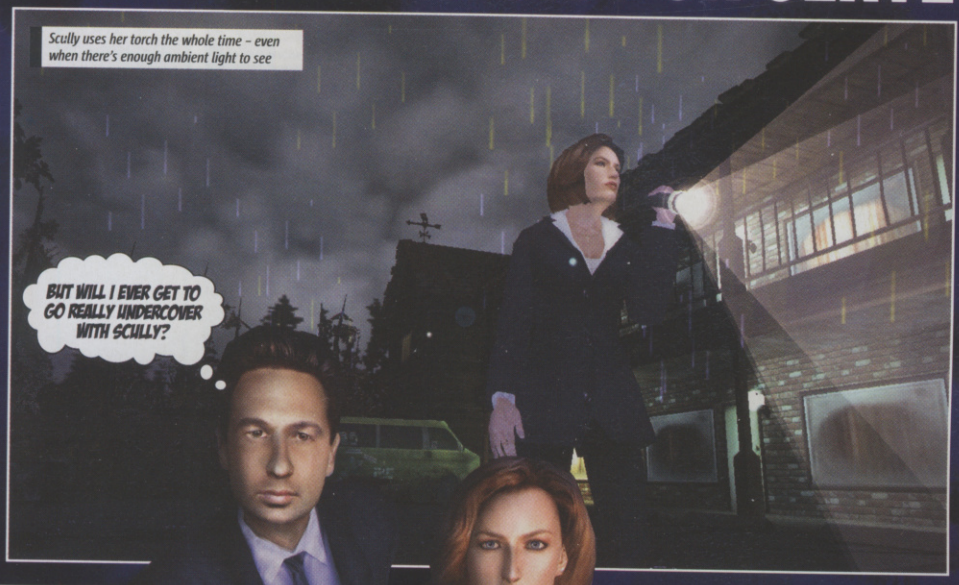
AVAILABLE ON

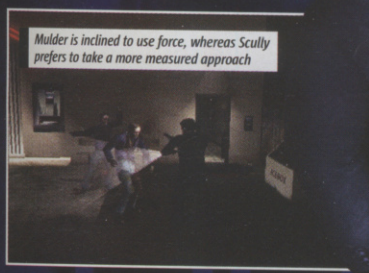
PS2

ALSO ON

XBOX

WWW.THEX-FILES.VUGAMES.COM





It's been many a full moon since Mulder and Scully graced our TV screens with a new episode of The X-Files. So all those gibbering conspiracy theorists that worship the show will be over said moon to hear that this is much better than the full motion video effort that featured the stars back on PSone.

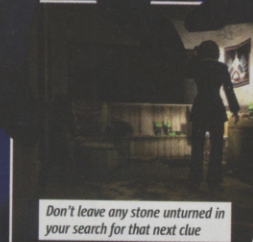
The action is set at the beginning of the seventh TV series, and kicks off as our investigators head to the town of Red Falls where some strange murders and unexplained events have been reported.

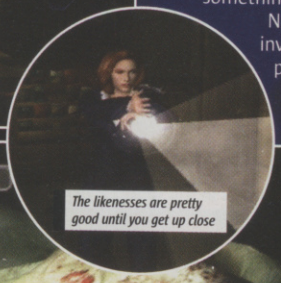
Which of the pair you choose to play as will change the way the game plays, and also how you should approach things. Mulder is more impulsive and quick to draw his gun, while Scully is more restrained and scientific. Most of the time you'll be on your lonesome, though the two meet up sporadically to fight unexplained crime together.

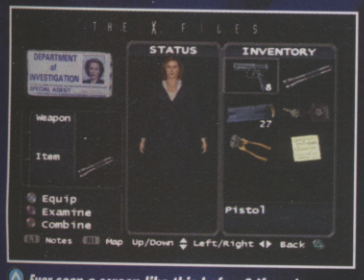
XPECT THE XPECTED

Gameplay-wise, X-Files looks to be a solid slice of survival horror. On the downside, it has all the restrictive camera angles and dodgy controls that we were already tired of when Resi 3 came out on PSone. It's also got that emphasis on searching everywhere that basically means you have to scour the screen for tiny flashes to see if there's something worth nabbing.

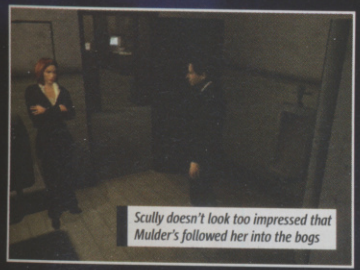
Nevertheless, the involvement of all the chief players will be a major draw for fans, as will the price tag of £23. While it's unlikely to redefine the boundaries of adventure gaming, it could well be an atmospheric outing for those pining for the bickering of those argumentative agents. ✷


Don't leave any stone unturned in your search for that next clue

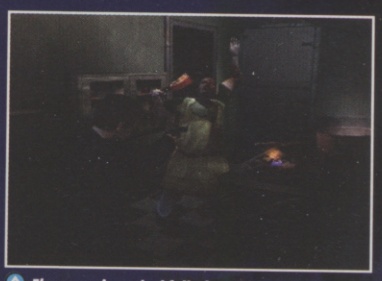




Ever seen a screen like this before? If you've played Resident Evil, you'll be at home here



Some of the puzzles are quite cool – like when you have to do an autopsy on this corpse

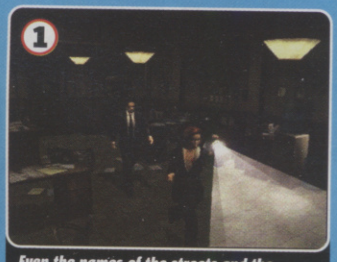


The game is packed full of zombies, which is a bit weird as that's the one monster they didn't actually encounter on the show

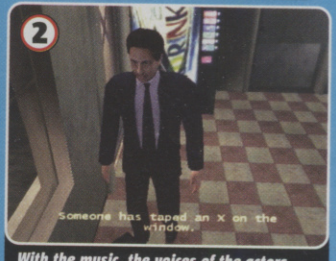
THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE

The X-Files: Resist Or Serve is written by one of the show's writers.

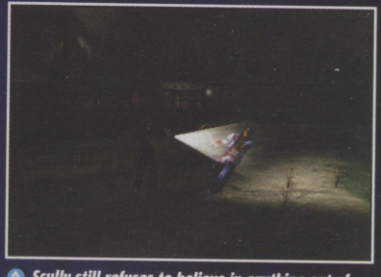
You'll visit locations from the TV series, and encounter some of the most memorable characters such as one-armed Krycek, The Cigarette Smoking Man and The Lone Gunman.



Even the names of the streets and the movie posters on the walls often refer back to episodes of the show



With the music, the voices of the actors and the intriguing storyline, that classic X-Files atmosphere is in full effect



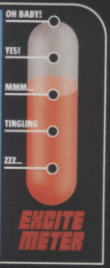
Scully still refuses to believe in anything out of the ordinary, even though she's just killed 37 zombies

CVG OPINION

Although it's looking like a slightly unoriginal survival horror in the Resi mould, the brilliant X-Files atmosphere and £20 price tag may well save it for fans of the show. **Steve O**

WE LOVE
- The sound – voiceovers, music, the lot
- Intriguing plot by the show's writers
- Who you play as changes the game

WE HATE
- Old-fashioned Resi gameplay
- Ropey animations
- Zombies? They never met zombies!



Crimson Tears

クリムゾン ティアーズ

* PUBLISHER CAPCOM
* DEVELOPER SPIKE
* OUT: SUMMER

ONLINE GAMING

IN A NUTSHELL

A trio of wicked fighters acting as mutinoid biological weapons are sent to explore so-called Dimension Mazes. Set in Tokyo in the near future, a mysterious explosion has blacked out the city. What the...?

AVAILABLE ON

PS2

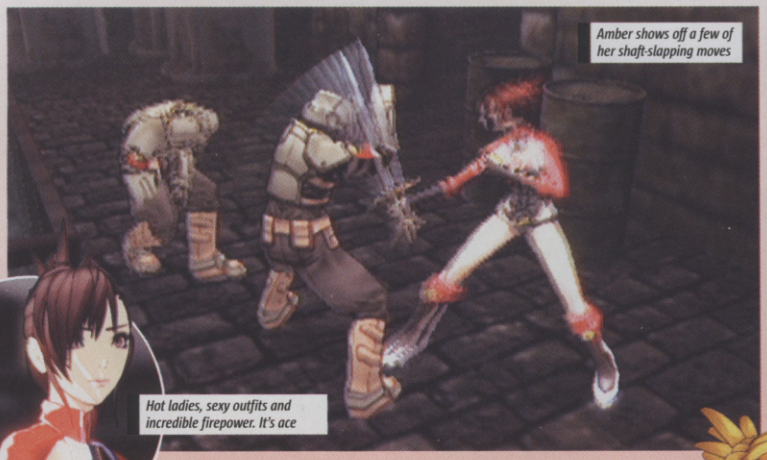
WWW.CAPCOM.COM

Equip special gloves and weapons to increase your combo power

The 'High Toon'-style cut-scenes are worthy of a full-length anime movie

Say hello to Amber, Kadie and Tokio. Two babes and one guy with rock-hard thighs, fists of steel and one-track minds. But don't get the wrong idea.

Sure, they want to wrap their legs around you, but only to crush your puny ribcage before moving onto the next poor sap. Their mission is to cleanse the dungeon-like Dimension Mazes of all rogue A.R.M.A soldiers before they escape and start attacking the citizens of Tokyo (circa 2044). Each Maze will be different every time you enter, and you'll be re-entering them a lot, as even on Normal mode you'll find them very challenging to complete.



Amber shows off a few of her shaft-slapping moves

Hot ladies, sexy outfits and incredible firepower. It's ace

TWIN BAZOOKAS

The gameplay is simple – possibly a little too simple. Although you do get the chance to explore a small part of blacked-out Tokyo and visit some shopkeepers and chat to the locals, the majority of the action takes place in these randomly generated Dimension Mazes.

You can only send one of your characters through at a time, but it's a good idea to make sure that all are kept levelled-up rather than sticking to one favourite as they all have particular skills.

Amber knows her way around a sword shaft, Kadie is more athletic, while man-mountain Tokio is the firearms specialist. All the characters can use guns (though hand-to-hand combat is much more satisfying), plus you can string together spectacular combos, which can be upgraded by collecting expansion parts.

There's a lot of short-term fun to be had here for sure, but battling through each Dimension Maze can get repetitive in the long-term. So while the stunning cel-shaded graphics and anime-style 'High Toon' movies ensure that Crimson Tears demands your attention, we wonder if the gameplay is deep enough to hold it. *

RUN LIKE HELL

Crimson Tears has a unique way of giving your character another chance when KO'd.

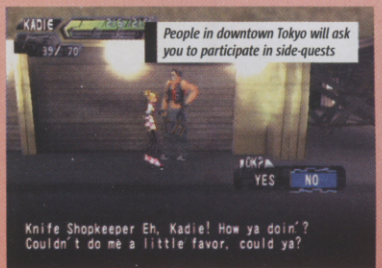
If one of the other characters can manage to run back thorough the Maze and rescue them, within a strict time limit, they get to keep all their items.

Dodge the Mutinoids or fail and lose all your gear. It's that simple

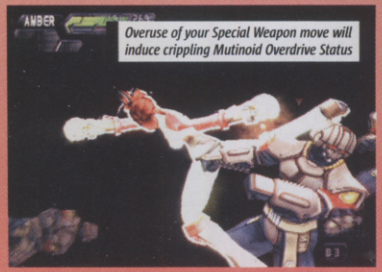
Get there in time and you'll rescue your mate and keep your stuff. Everyone's a winner!

For zombies, this is actually quite a fun night out

There are strippers in Amsterdam who would kill for such tricks



People in downtown Tokyo will ask you to participate in side-quests



Overuse of your Special Weapon move will induce crippling Mutinoid Overdrive Status

If you get poisoned, search for an antidote or your HP will drain away

Now that's what you call a smokin' outfit...

CVG OPINION

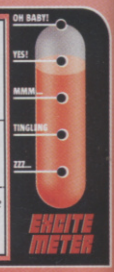
Dazzling, oddly compelling game – a strange hybrid of arcade-style beat 'em up and stripped-down RPG. Could do with more gameplay depth, though. **Maura**

WE LOVE

- Breathtaking cel-shaded movies
- Non-stop neck-breaking action
- Hassle-free RPG-style levelling up

WE HATE

- Not being able to explore Tokyo more
- Losing all your items if a rescue attempt fails



* PUBLISHER
KOEI
* DEVELOPER
MICRO CABIN
* OUT:
JUNE 2004

IN A NUTSHELL

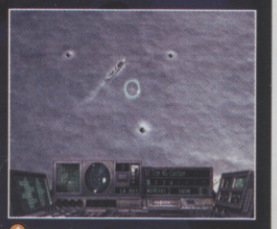
Old school naval strategy sim set in a fictitious world where the almighty Virshian armada aim to rule the waves and only your comparatively tiny Tactical Battle Group stands between them and victory.

AVAILABLE ON

PS2

WWW.KOEI.COM

Many of your missions involve destroying curiously empty enemy installations



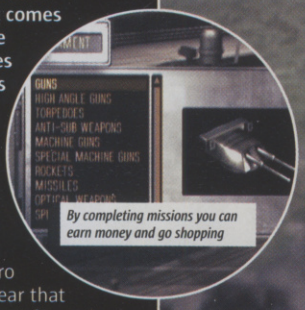
Steering your ship through mine-infested waters is a tricky business

Use the control panel to launch missiles, depth charges and planes

NAVAL OPS: COMMANDER

Having made its name with some of the finest combat strategy games known to man, beast or samurai, it comes of something of a surprise to see Koei dipping its toes into the unfamiliar waters of a naval sim.

At first glance, it seems that the PS2's mighty processing power is wasted on the tiny ships and distinctly old-school graphics. However, if you can get past the retro visuals it soon becomes clear that there's just as much strategic fun to be had in the water as there is on dry land.



By completing missions you can earn money and go shopping

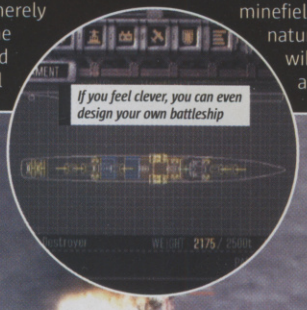
Take that, you evil radar tower of doom! Die like a pointy metal dog!

NAVAL GAZING

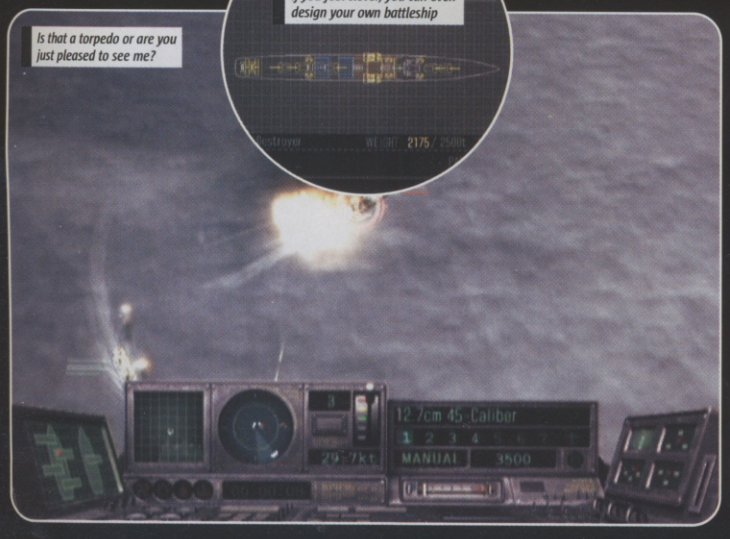
From the start you have command of three ships, which you control from a top-down perspective. These include your main battleship and two escorts. As you progress, you'll be able to add more craft to your fleet, including fighter planes.

The first few missions are very simple, requiring you to merely point your torpedoes in the direction of the enemy and sink them. Later on, you'll have to sink entire enemy fleets, take out strategic land-based installations and weave your way through perilous minefields. The cumbersome nature of your battleship will frustrate you at first as it frequently rams headfirst into the nearest harbour wall, but it wouldn't be very realistic if such a huge ship turned neatly on a dime.

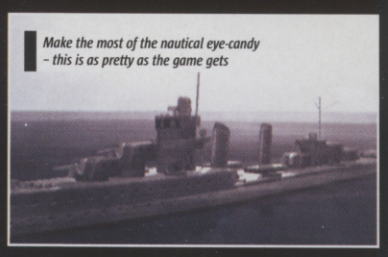
Naval Ops is probably more suited to PC playing strategists, but may still be worth a look if you like messing around in boats. ✷



If you feel clever, you can even design your own battleship



Is that a torpedo or are you just pleased to see me?



Make the most of the nautical eye-candy – this is as pretty as the game gets

CVG OPINION Although little more than glorified Battleships, this makes a change from the usual battle strategy sims, even if the sluggish controls take some getting used to. **Maura**

WE LOVE
- It's something different
- The crazy, over-excited voice over
- Hitting enemy ships with torpedoes

WE HATE
- Relentlessly shrill military soundtrack
- Bog-standard graphics
- Ships are sluggish to control

.HACK MUTATION PART

* PUBLISHER
ATARI
* DEVELOPER
BANDAI
* OUT: JUNE 18

PS2

WWW.DOTHACK.COM

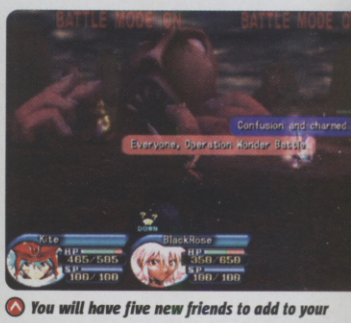
The second instalment in a four part series, .hack//Mutation launches you straight back into the role playing action, immediately after the end of th first game, .hack//Infection.

With gameplay virtually identical to the first adventure, you once again find yourself in an offlin replica of an online multiplayer RPG, trying to find out what caused the mysterious disappearance of your friends. As you explore you can chat to fellow gamers, shop for items and spells and develop your battling skills in the labyrinthine dungeons.

MORE OF THE SAME

.hack devotees will be delighted with the opportun to transfer their saved data from the previous game and delve deeper into the mystery, but those new to the adventure's unique universe will probably fin the lack of a tutorial confusing and should probably start with the first game instead. ✷

At the start of the game, hot gal Black Rose is waiting online to greet you. Hubba hubba!



You will have five new friends to add to your party this time, each with their own special skills

Raise Grunties and enter them in the all-new Fla Race to earn bonuses and useful prizes

WE LOVE
- Free anime DVD expands the story
- Absorbing sim of online gaming
- Using saved data from first game

WE HATE
- No tutorial
- You have to finish the first game to be able to transfer saved data

MONSTER HUNTER

"MORE THAN WEAPONS ARE NEEDED TO TAKE DOWN EACH BEAST, HENCE THREE-PLAYER BACK-UP"

When lizards get this tall they often get a stoop too

* PUBLISHER CAPCOM
* DEVELOPER CAPCOM
* OUT: TBC

ONLINE GAMING x4

IN A NUTSHELL

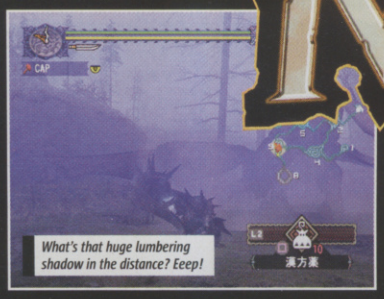
Online or off, join a team of extravagantly armed and armoured bounty hunters on safari for the biggest game of all, with beautiful graphics, huge landscapes and all manner of character customisation.

AVAILABLE ON

PS2

WWW.E-CAPCOM.COM/SHOP/?GOODS=1199151

In the bone-filled quarries and chasms you'll see real horrors



What's that huge lumbering shadow in the distance? Eeep!

A few years back, punters were tantalised with the notion that online gameplay was going to be the final revolution in gaming. It's been slow-going, especially here in the UK, where companies seem to have forgotten that we too have broadband. Of course, elsewhere, publishers have finally begun to produce some quality online content, and Monster Hunter could end up at the head of the pack... assuming it arrives intact.

Produced by the team responsible for Resident Evil Outbreak, the structure allows for four players to safari together online, armed to tackle monsters. A detailed town acts as a communication hub and sortie point from which player groups can pick up bounties on gigantic beasts, or take on more materialistic quests. Man on monster action dominates, with tasks like protecting towns and facing down rivals deepening the formula.

And those monsters are huge. We've seen a couple of dragons that dwarf the legendary mighty Smaug, not to mention vicious packs of raptor-style dinosaurs, which attack without warning. To combat the creatures, your heavily customisable character can choose from weapons like foolishly long lances, huge swords and sledgehammers or rifles. Better yet, scavenged material and items taken from kills (like dragon teeth) can be used to improve your tools or create new kit.

DESTROY ALL MONSTERS!

But more than weapons are needed to take down each beast, hence three players' worth of back-up. Attack characteristics for each weapon are very different, meaning the brute armed with a broadsword can't simply swing away and expect to win, or even live. Teamwork and a spot of strategy never hurts, so the faster squad members might distract a target and lead it to an ambush site, where the team sapper has laid a pit or net trap. From there, it's short work for the fourth, burliest character to bash the critter into boot leather.

What sets Monster Hunter apart from slower fare like Phantasy Star Online is the analogue battle control, which apes Rise To Honour's one good quality by mapping basic strikes to the right thumbstick. It takes a bit of getting used to, but also

KILLER CUSTOMISATION

Having a load of options for character faces and outfits is nothing new.

It's the animal product possibilities we love, like the sword made from jawbone, or the Flintstones-style hippo garbage disposal we've always dreamed of. Hair options are one thing, but All Stone-Age Cons? That's progress!

The mixture of lizard-like dinosaurs and pure fantasy beasts is a change from metallic baddies and sci-fi nonsense

We appreciate great visuals as much as the next person, but we don't want to get this close to a dragon!

It's like taking a stroll in the New Forest... except for the blood, guts and destruction kicking off all over the forest floor

The battle for the lush oasis begins in earnest

The handy numbered map in the top right helps you keep track of important places and objects

With the bone garage done, you can rest up Flintstones-style and maybe griddle yourself some monster haunch

NATURAL HORROR

We're not sure quite what's in the water in the world of Monster Hunter, but we ARE sure it can't be anything good.

Some of the beasts you encounter are colossal and ferocious. Think the T-Rex from Jurassic Park crossed with Predator and a hint of Balrog thrown in – and you'll be getting close.

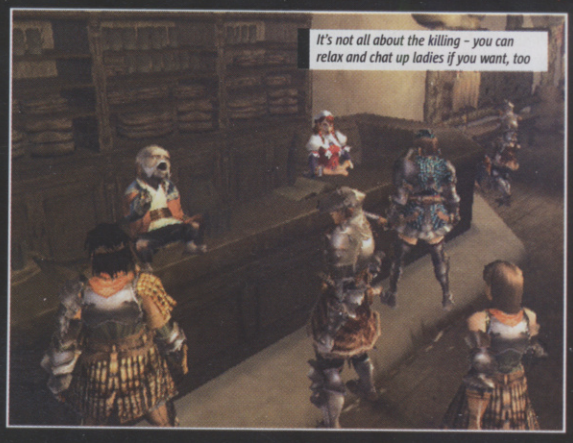
You really need to stay away from the business end of the tail

Once kitted out try exploiting weaknesses

You've got to be quick though 'cos that tail's coming down again soon!

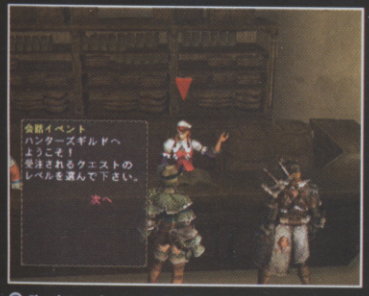
Get in between the tail and the body and slash away for the quickest way to victory

Equipping the best armour and weapons for these big brutes is key



It's not all about the killing – you can relax and chat up ladies if you want, too

Crossbows make for perfect ranged weapons but won't always pierce scales



The chat and communication system feels dead clunky. Why no headset voice command support?

keeps the combat simple and fast, with a decent range of technique. In practice, the system is a lot of fun, and it allows quick reactions to animal ambush. The only drag in combat is the lack of voice chat – the Outbreak-style text speak drastically needs an update.

BEAUTIFULLY UGLY BEASTS

Monster Hunter is already pumping out some lusty visuals. The landscape is enormous in scope and packed with verdant jungle and grassy plains. The incredibly detailed vistas are the perfect setting for the titanic beasts populating many areas, all of which look far better than what's found in a typical multiplayer online RPG. Dinosaurs are obviously the big influence, but that's hardly a bad thing. Combined with the widely varied character models, this could be a standout visual presentation.

But the idea is for much of the environment to become more than a backdrop, with grass that can be cut and other bits of botany to collect for use as medicine and poison. If the team takes the detail deep enough, there'll be chances to mine ore and collect other material to add to that suit of Gojira-scale armour.

There's still some question as to whether we'll get our hands on Monster Hunter at all, given Capcom's recent track record. The game is playable now in a stripped-down form offline, but really – what's the point of that? We're hoping for the best, though, since the title could well become the bridge between real action and MMOs that so many have longed for. *

"THE INCREDIBLY DETAILED VISTAS ARE THE PERFECT SETTING FOR THE TITANIC BEASTS"

You can go get pissed in the pub if you want to, but don't forget about the monsters prowling outside

CVG OPINION It's got all the ingredients: fun combat, over-the-top characters and visuals as exquisite as we've seen on the PS2. Bring it home online, and we're sold. **Alex P**

WE LOVE
- Lush, super-detailed graphics
- Customisable monster skin armour
- Task-based teamwork

WE HATE
- Initial difficulty could be high
- What's Capcom got against a bit of voice chat?

Elementals let you face off against stronger opponents without levelling up, allowing a bit of freedom

The camera swoops in for interiors and soars high for exteriors

- PUBLISHER: ACCLAIM
- DEVELOPER: INXILE
- OUT: OCTOBER

ONLINE GAMING

IN A NUTSHELL

A role-player that comes with a twenty-year heritage. Pokes fun at the genre's clichés while hopefully still retaining the stuff that make them fun. And it's got a few songs about beer, and some massive paps too. Nice.

AVAILABLE ON

PS2

ALSO ON

XBOX, PC

WWW.THE-BARDS-TALE.COM

Early enemies are mostly wild beasts but later you'll twat orcs and zombie Vikings

The world is rich and varied with clear Rings influences like this mountain pass

We're most excited about the funny stuff. The Bard even finds an Easter Egg!

THE BARD'S TALE

Just whoa back there! You've seen the olde worlde name, the fantasy land screenshots, and you've realised The Bard's Tale is another RPG. But don't flick the page just yet!

Sure, this is unmistakably a role-player, but it's also got a sense of humour, which has to be rarer than an episode of Eastenders with a happy ending. While The Bard's Tale follows the conventions of the genre, it's gleefully taking the piss as it goes along.

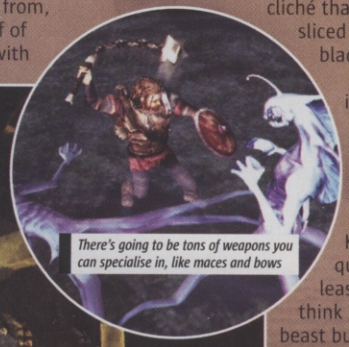
The location's inspired by the Orkney Isles, with some textures directly mapped

RAT'S ASS

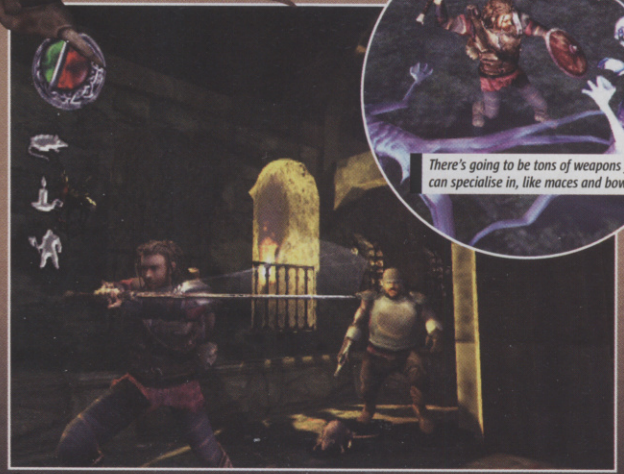
Example? Alright, know how at the start of every bloody RPG you've got to kill rats (what the hell have they ever done to us anyway, apart from, um, kill half of Europe with the Black Death)? The Bard's Tale sees this as a classic RPG cliché that deserves to be sliced with its shining blade of parody.

So you start off in a pub's basement killing rats, but there's only one scabby little bugger scurrying about. Kill it and, TA-DA, quest complete! At least that's what you think before a six-foot beast bursts through the wall and flamegrills you.

The whole game plays with your expectations like this. Even the Bard himself is a lazy-arsed piss-head who'll only take on a quest if there's a chance of some food or fekking at the end of it. Who can't relate to that?



There's going to be tons of weapons you can specialise in, like maces and bows



Bard's Tale is based on a 20-year- old text adventure from pre-graphics whore days

SERIOUSLY FUNNY

Now, if you're an RPG fan you're probably a little concerned about an RPG taking the mick out of RPGs. Don't worry. The Bard's Tale looks like it's still going to be a solid adventure to boot.

Think Baldur's Gate and Fallout: BOS. The action is viewed from above but the visuals are better than usual for this viewpoint and the camera reacts intelligently to the scenery.

Combat is in real-time, with sword-swipes and mace-mashes mapped onto the pad for intuitive skull-crushing. And the Bard can play riffs on his lute to summon magical allies like a fire elemental and an electric spider thing. These are all mapped to the pad too, so you won't have to frantically flail through inventories at critical moments.

Looks pretty interesting, we reckon. The Bard's Tale could be an RPG that's appealing both to those who laugh at its anal idiosyncrasies while still appeasing the hardcore fans. As long as you've got a sense of humour, that is... ✷

ELE-MENTALISTS

The Bard's handy with his lute and can summon magical pals by playing tunes, a bit like our old fave Ocarina Of Time.

Your first ditty will summon a useless rat, but as you solve quests you'll learn how to summon dudes that really put the mental into Elemental – like a big fiery fiend and a massive suit of armoured knight!

Your Mana bar shows you just how long you can sustain your Elementals for

As you learn tunes you'll get a heap of mates with individual skills and strengths

Picking different Elementals to suit the situation is a big part of the strategy

This angelic bird heals your hurts. She's about the only lassie The Bard can't shag

CVG OPINION

Ace to see a game laughing at the conventions of the genre. Could be cracking fun, so long as it doesn't turn out like Jo Brand – funny, but a total munter. **Graeme**

WE LOVE
- Piss-taking sense of humour
- Streamlined inventory system
- Impressive top-down visuals

WE HATE
- Not everyone will get the humour
- Storyline seems pretty restrictive
- Could annoy hardcore RPG fans

SPYRO & CRASH BANDICOOT FUSION

* PUBLISHER
VIVENDI
* DEVELOPER
VICARIOUS VISIONS
* OUT:
JUNE

x4

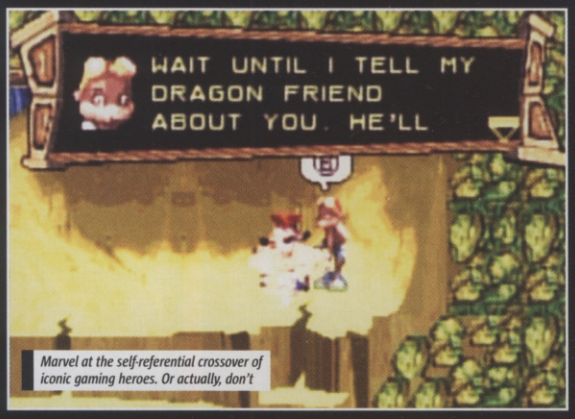
IN A NUTSHELL

Spyro and Crash Bandicoot join forces for the very first time in two platform and mini-game-filled action game crossover titles. You can trade cards with pals who own other versions of the game, too.

AVAILABLE ON

GAME BOY ADVANCE

WWW.VUGAMES.COM/PRODUCT.DO?GAMEPLATFORMID=1333



Marvel at the self-referential crossover of iconic gaming heroes. Or actually, don't

Marvel at the self-referential crossover of iconic gaming genres

If you were going to pair two historical games heroes together, who would you choose? Mario and Sonic? Street Fighter's Ryu and Resi's Jill?

We'd really love to see Pac-Man and Solid Snake teaming up for some ghost-chomping counter-terrorist action. But it's unlikely that Crash Bandicoot and Spyro the effing Dragon would be top of your list of deadly double acts. Still, that's what you get in the two forthcoming Fusion titles on GBA. Big woop.

There are some funny moments – like when Spyro turns the sheep into toast

DOUBLE THE PLEASURE?

The idea is that Spyro and Crash's arch nemeses Ripto and Neo Cortex have joined forces in the underground tunnels linking Crash and Spyro's worlds. Characters from the two games appear in the other's worlds, cards can be collected and traded between the two versions and the titles even share the same basic gameplay and mini-games.

It sounds like a cheap cash-in to make twice as much money. It's clear there's not enough variation between the two games to warrant buying both, even at this preview stage. The emphasis is placed firmly on beating mini-game challenges and as such, the two titles have more in common with party games like Muppet Party Cruise (wha...?) and Mario Party than Crash's usual mental platforming antics and Spyro's isometric adventuring.

The graphics are nice, with 3D motion-captured models on tasty backgrounds

This is a clever challenge, with the camera zooming in and out as you protect Crash

FREAKIN' FAMILIAR

Don't believe us about how the two games are basically the same thing repackaged and with different visuals? Check out these mini-games of shame for the proof.

Although we should say that Crash kills enemies by spinning and Spyro by breathing fire on them, so at least that's one thing that's different.

Crash goes mental in his armoured tank. The controls are currently awful in this section

And look! It's Spyro in a tank too. Equally dodgy control issues plague this challenge

The cards you trade between games aren't even that exciting. Good grief

ORANGE PUBES

Still, the challenges, while simplistic, are pretty good fun. The biggest potential problem we can see is there's not enough cool platforming between the mini-games, so Crash and Spyro fans could feel short-changed. To make up for this the games can be played with up to four people in a party game style, plus there's the trading.

We're not entirely convinced but our versions were early so maybe there's still more to go in. Crash and Spyro traditionalists had better hope so anyway. ✳

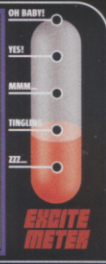
Ride the polar bear, er, in the jungle. Hmm. It's good fun though

This trial is straight out of the Dark Ages of games design. Sort it out, lads

CVG OPINION An interesting concept but maybe it'll prove just too simplistic in practice. We'll see when we get our furry mitts on the finished versions. **Lee**

WE LOVE
- Breathe fire on innocent sheep!
- Fun if you have lots of friends and an attention span disorder

WE HATE
- No classic Crash or Spyro gameplay
- Overly simplistic mini-games
- Spyro and Crash are a bit lame



- PUBLISHER SONY
- DEVELOPER EUROCOM
- OUT: JULY

ONLINE GAMING | x4

IN A NUTSHELL

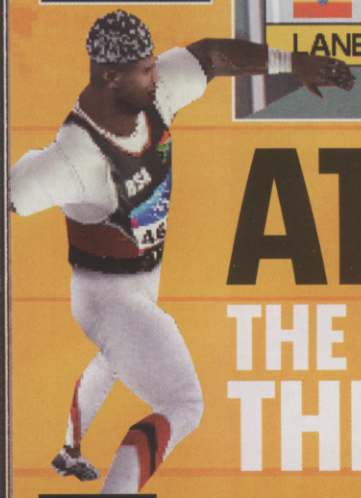
Compete in 2004's Olympics without leaving the comfort of your armchair. There's over 25 events to get physical with in the best tradition of athletics videogaming. Best stock up on replacement joypads now though.

AVAILABLE ON

PS2

WWW.PLAYSTATION.CO.UK

That's not a very Ethiopian sounding name!



ATHENS 2004

THE OFFICIAL VIDEOGAME OF THE OLYMPIC GAMES

Athletes have it easy. They run around all day, saying things like "I'm training" while the rest of us study or work for a living.

We're at our desks turning into slobs, they're out on the running track getting muscular and toned bodies. It's not fair! They even get medals occasionally. Get ready for the slobs' revenge.

JAMBOREE OF JOCK STRAPS

The day's come when we get to be lean, mean, running machines – without even leaving our armchair! Put that in your urine test and smoke it, Lycra lovers.

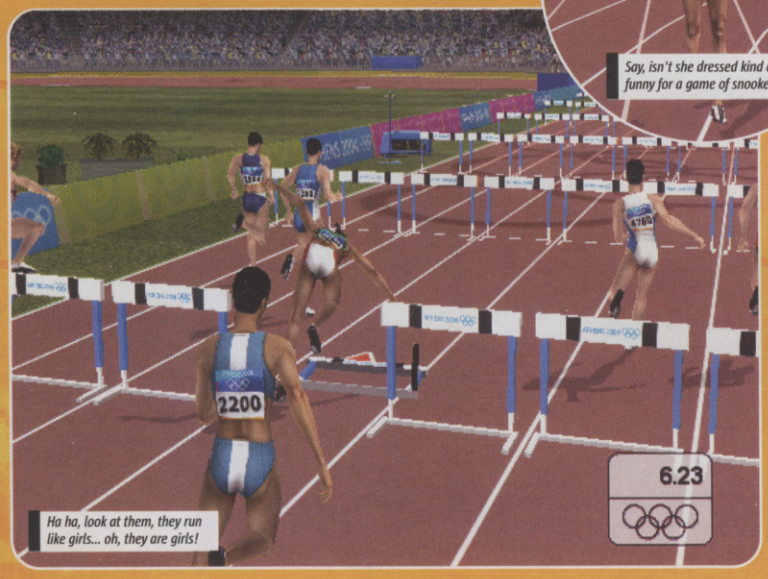
Say, isn't she dressed kind of funny for a game of snooker?

It's an Olympic year and that can only mean one thing. Well, lots of things actually, but for the purpose of our preview, it means one thing... the official Olympic videogame! Get out your leotards, spiked trainers and dopey mascot for another summer of sweat, blisters, record breaking and plenty of broken pads.

Athens 2004 is a feast of sporting spectacle that delivers over 25 different events for you to perspire over. There's everything from the 100 metres to Equestrian Jumping and quite a few treats in-between.

TAKE YOUR MARKS

The events are spread over seven different disciplines; Aquatics, Athletics, Gymnastics, Archery, Equestrian, Shooting and Weightlifting. It's a great selection and a vast

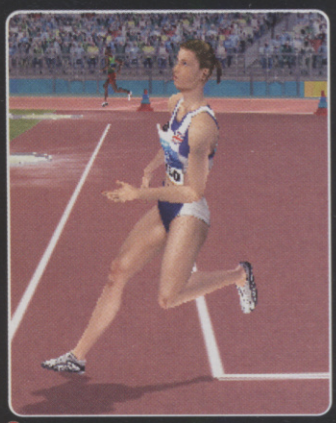


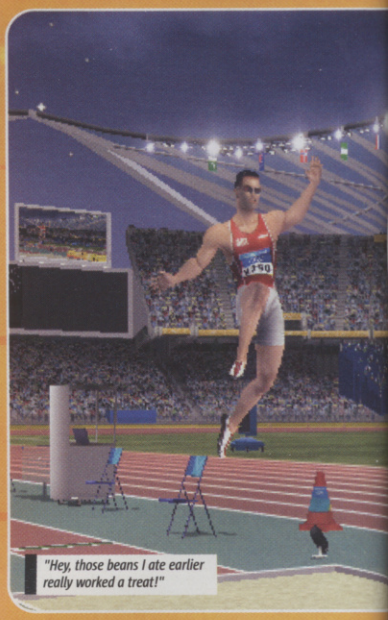
Ha ha, look at them, they run like girls... oh, they are girls!

MAGICAL MOTION

We've all seen those photos of people wearing a weird Lycra suit covered in ping-pong balls and surrounded by cameras.

This is to accurately capture the movements of an athlete through a technique called Motion Capture. Athens 2004 has come up trumps with this trick. The results are on screen every time your virtual athlete sets about breaking a new record. Armchair athletics has never looked so good.

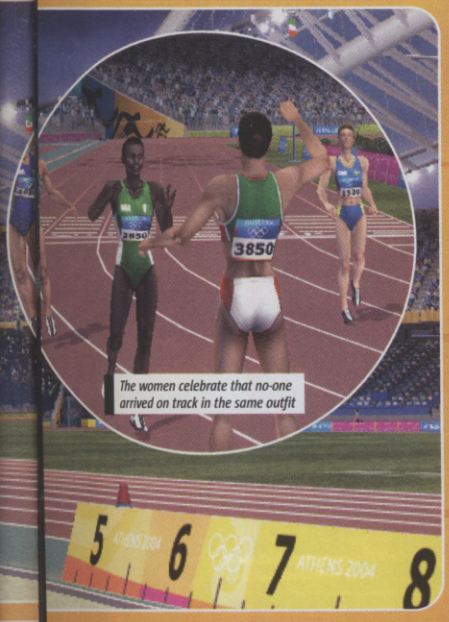

In an average game she'd appear to be more upright and less focused



"Hey, those beans I ate earlier really worked a treat!"

We didn't know musical statues was an Olympic Sport this year. Another sport for the Yanks to be proud of

The targets for the archery competition were considered quite controversial



BREAK IT DOWN

Here's the complete list of all the events in Athens 2004

AQUATICS
100m Backstroke
100m Breaststroke
100m Butterfly
100m Freestyle

ATHLETICS
High Jump
Long Jump
Triple Jump
Discus Throw
Pole Vault
Shot Put
100m
200m
400m
800m
1500m
100m Hurdles
110m Hurdles
Decathlon
Heptathlon

GYMNASTICS
Artistic Floor
Exercise
Rings
Vault

ARCHERY
70m

EQUESTRIAN
Individual Mixed

SHOOTING
Skeet

WEIGHTLIFTING
Clean and Jerk

In perfect shape going over the bar, she's gonna do it!

improvement over rival sports titles that offer only track and field events.

CONTROL GYMNASTICS

Due to the spread of events, there's also a diverse way of controlling the action. The sprints and power events, such as weight lifting and the javelin, require lots of button-bashing. Whereas artistic gymnastics has a control system where you have to match the on-screen commands with your controller, just like Dance Dance Revolution.

With so many events to choose from, the only concession we've seen is that some activities have very basic controls to keep everything simple. One victim here is the Triple Jump, that employs button-bashing and three taps of the shoulder button for the hop, skip and jump.

SIMPLE MINDS

Rival titles have required you to hold down a button to select your jump angle – here that's all taken care of automatically. It's a shame as half the skill is removed from the discipline.

That criticism aside, Athens 2004 is shaping up to be a worthy official tie-in to the games, boasting authentic stadiums, some spectacular motion-capture and lots of different ways to play. From what we've played so far we reckon it's sure to become a great party game, and with so many events, there's something here for everybody.

A handy arrow points the way for the more cerebrally challenged 100 metre runners

Strewth! Those shorts don't appear to be very comfortable

If he knocks any more fences over, that horse will be put out to pasture. The glue factory pasture

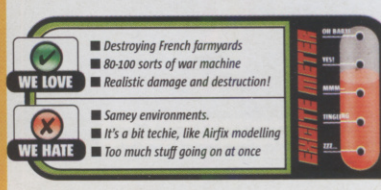
SOLDIERS HEROES OF WORLD WAR II

This real time strategy nonsense is all the same – select the men, show them the enemy, sit back in your seat and shout "Boring!" at the top of your voice. Soldiers: Heroes of WWII, however, breaks the rules.

This time you're the man in direct control of your men, not some invisible demon in your PC. You do the shooting, you do the tank driving, you chuck the grenades, and if it all goes spectacularly tits up then its YOUR fault. What's more, you can blow up everything, and when we say everything we mean it.

Tracks get blasted off tanks, tyres get shot out on speeding motorbikes, fires spread uncontrollably, artillery blows huge chunks of buildings into smouldering rubble... and because of a giant calculator in your PC its all worked out with physics and other such boring stuff. But you can still blow people's heads off. Woohoo!

This guy suddenly remembers that being the lead tank was like a death sentence later in the war



PS2

RELEASE DATE
21 MAY

GAME INFO
COST: £39.99
PLAYERS: 1

CONTACT INFO
- PUB: TAKE 2
- DEV: SQUARE-ENIX
- WWW.SQUARE-ENIX-USA.COM/GAMES/DRAKENGARD

COMPUTER & VIDEO GAMES CVG EXCLUSIVE FROM JAPAN

Drakengard™

It's gory, it's grown-up... and it's from Square?!

During Strafe mode your Dragon's fiery breath helps clear the way for battles on foot

There are over 60 types of weapon in the game and most are found in secret chests

Imagine a game in which you can do this sort of thing, AND climb off the dragon. It's here!

Think 'medieval' and you'll imagine court jesters capering, knights with round tables and, if you're like us, tons of grisly beheadings. It's this gore angle on 'medieval' combined with a fantastical view of the armour and weaponry of those times that has inspired legendary developer Square-Enix's upcoming blockbuster. And it's looking so freaky cool that CVG just had to travel to Japan bring you the drop on Drakengard...

RAINING FIRE AND BLOOD

Usually from Square-Enix, which in the past gave us Final Fantasy and Dragon Warrior, the games have a distinctly Japanese feel. Even Final Fantasy Tactics and Final Fantasy IX, despite a certain medieval style, were closer to animé than to King Arthur.

The Drakengard team wanted their opus to conjure up visions of crimson clashes on blood-soaked battlefields... with added dragons and monsters! Just as we see the samurai era as a fascinating and bloodthirsty backdrop for adventure, enjoy Onimusha and Dynasty Warriors, Drakengard takes the same approach to European legend. Cool, huh?

Sometimes a cool new franchise happens by accident rather than design, and originally Drakengard was intended to be pure action, focused heavily on a dragon-riding element (See box below for an explanation).

Drakengard has some of the finest examples of CG movies yet seen

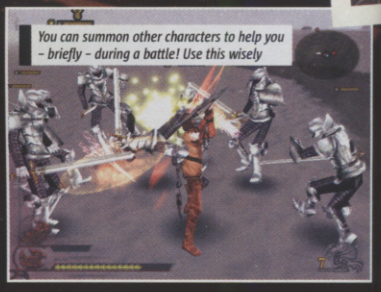
But since being taken on board by Square-Enix, role-playing elements sure enough worked their way into the final mix, highlighting a need to develop the anti-hero Caim as a courageous figure, even when he's not straddling a bloody great dragon.

ALL-ACTION RPG: A NEW GENRE?

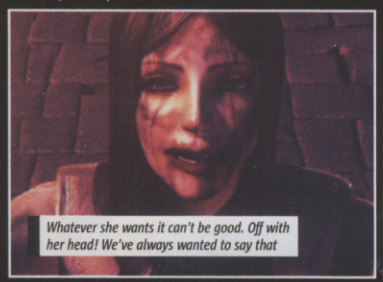
The result is a mainly action-oriented quest mixing Panzer Dragoon flying/shooting with Dynasty Warriors fighting. Caim or his dragon partner get experience points to upgrade magic attacks and strengthen weapons, situation depending. It ties together in a typically heartfelt storyline from Square-Enix, with dark fantasy overtones to please fans of that genre.

Before the game shipped in late 2003 in Japan, there was concern that guys heavily into action games would resent the need to build EXP, and RPG guys'd hate dealing with so much hands-on battling. Nevertheless the game has been a success, voted in the Top 50 best games of 2003, and was one of only two completely original concepts in that group.

Tousled hair and Caim-to-bed eyes, our anti-hero is sure to be a hit with the ladies



You can summon other characters to help you – briefly – during a battle! Use this wisely



Whatever she wants it can't be good. Off with her head! We've always wanted to say that

WE ARE DRAGONSPHERE, HEAR US ROAR!

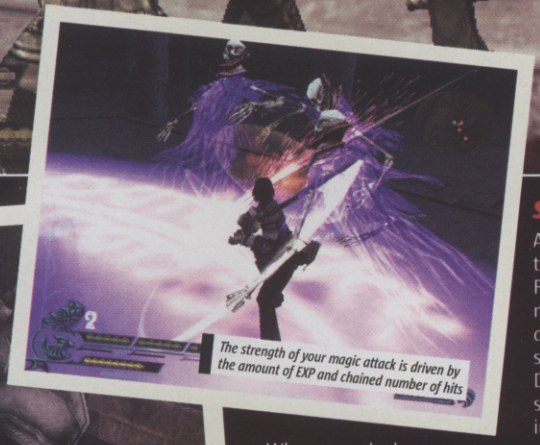
Key members of the Drakengard team, lined up for a comedy CVG photograph! The guy sitting cross-legged is Square-Enix Producer Takamasa Shiba. Everyone else is part of the Cavia development team, comprised of ex-Namco employees... and one whacky movie director!

Before Drakengard was picked up by Square-Enix, these renegades were working under the name of Project Dragonsphere. Between them they have been responsible for such games as Ace Combat, Alpine Racer, and the Ridge Racer series. They wanted to do their own thing and Drakengard turned out to be it!

Clockwise from Shiba they are Takuya Iwasaki, Line Director; Kazuya Sasahara, Movie Director; Taro Yokoo, Director; Masatoshi Furubayashi, Lead Programmer; Akira Yasui, Art Director; Kimihiko Fujisaka, Character Design; and finally Taro Hasegawa, Monster Design.

"They want their opus to conjure up visions of crimson clashes on blood-soaked battlefields"

For the first time in Square history, the battles get bloody and horribly brutal. So... cool!



The strength of your magic attack is driven by the amount of EXP and chained number of hits

All enemies have bad habits for you to exploit during battle. Every foe has its weakness

When we asked Producer Takamasa Shiba on how to categorise Drakengard, he told us, "Videogames are becoming more difficult to put into genres, so what I thought was that we'd attempt to make a game that has lots of different features. Not just a different action game or a different RPG game – but something that was ultimately fun."

Very simply, everything lead character Caim gets involved with has a reason within the unfolding plot. So lets take a look at who the main guys are in Caim's 'Dark Fantasy' voyage, and where they fit in.

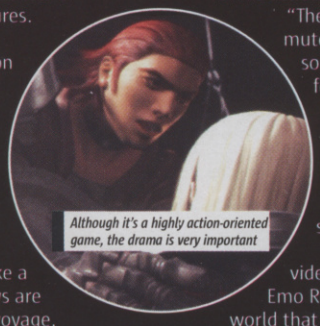
The Empire's resources seem endless, and this movie makes a big deal of the worrying odds

Every RPG needs a watery-eyed boy... no girl... no boy character. In Drakengard it's Seere

SPEECHLESS

At the start of the story, Caim battles to the gates of an Empire stronghold where Furiae is a captive. Mortally wounded, he makes a life-long pact with a wounded red dragon which means that man and beast share the same life force (yeah, kind a like Dragonheart) – but Caim must also sacrifice his voice. This makes for an interesting dramatic twist.

Line Director Takuya Iwasaki explained, "We wanted to get the story across by the protagonist listening to others rather than just babbling on about irrelevant stuff. This way the player will sympathise more deeply with Caim. Especially in the way the dragon keeps questioning Caim's reasons for his actions.



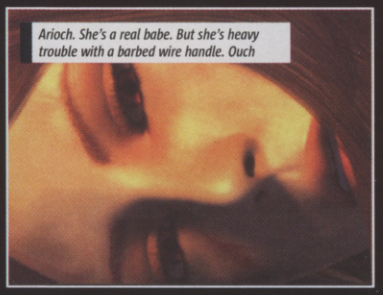
Although it's a highly action-oriented game, the drama is very important

"The idea of making Caim a mute lead to the hero being so obsessed with a desire for vengeance that he wasn't afraid of giving up one of his physical abilities to achieve this end. This makes the drive for revenge even stronger."

Sounds like the videogame equivalent of Emo Rock – you versus a world that doesn't care, right! »

DARK FANTASY TURNED NASTY

Starting with Caim, who's your typical anti-hero – all brooding and bad moody. Both Caim and his sister Furiae were once royalty, until a group called the Empire made its bid to take over the land. Their parents were both killed by one of the Empire's dragons when he was only a boy. The Empire then enslaved Furiae as their priestess, forcing Caim to fight alongside the Union rebels to win her back.

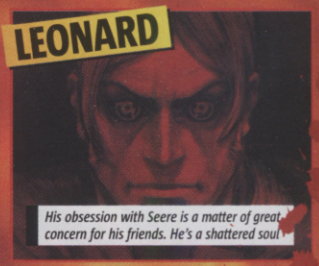


Arioch. She's a real babe. But she's heavy trouble with a barbed wire handle. Ouch

FRIENDS... OR THEREABOUTS

Relationships between characters are complex, and even quite dark.

There's Inuart, who is Furiae's sweetheart but can't get along well enough with Caim through jealousy. But he's nothing compared to the inner turmoil faced by Leonard, a blind warrior who adopts young Seere as a surrogate brother after blaming himself for the death of his true siblings. The scripting is so mature, and the voice acting so good, that drama really counts for a lot in Drakengard and compels you to play on for the next developments.



LEONARD

His obsession with Seere is a matter of great concern for his friends. He's a shattered soul

ARIOCH

Her blood lust and hatred for the Empire make Arioch a useful ally, but can she be trusted?

SEERE

Seere gets so many people doting over him that all pain just gets wrapped in cotton wool

VERDELET

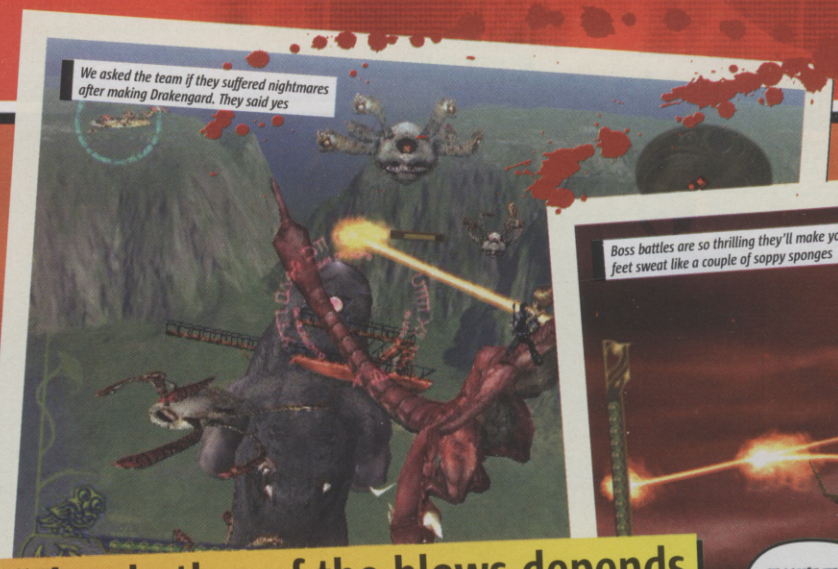
An aid to the princess Furiae, whose loyalties are torn between her and the Empire

THE SCRUM OR THE SKIES

Fight or flight, it's your call in Strafe mode. Battlefield skirmishes and airborne dogfights work hard to impress on their own terms, but Strafe really opened our eyes – it's where Caim can choose to struggle on foot among the Empire's legions, or summon the dragon to rain fiery-breath-death from above.

"Switching between two perspectives on one map was the hardest hurdle in development," Lead Programmer Furubayashi admitted. Certainly, we've never played anything like it. This is where Caim's unique character is highlighted. He becomes a sorta medieval Tommy Vercetti, with a dragon instead of a copter. Whistle at any time for the dragon to pick you up for low-alt bombardments, which include the most ferocious magic attacks in the game!

In strafe mode you reap the benefit of an evolved dragon, based on EXP from dogfights. When you've seen him writhing around with a ball of flame for a tail the size of a comet, you'll be punching the air. Remember, though: some enemies are resilient to fire so the dragon isn't merely a cheap get-out clause.



We asked the team if they suffered nightmares after making Drakengard. They said yes

Boss battles are so thrilling they'll make your feet sweat like a couple of soppy sponges

"The rhythm of the blows depends entirely on the size, weight and style of the blade"

Another eye-wateringly gorgeous cutscene before Caim is mortally wounded

You need to learn the best use of each magic attack. They don't all instantly save your bacon

MORE THAN YOU CAN CHEW

Caim literally hits the ground running in Drakengard... running for his life! Sword in hand, the bulk of the action he is involved with takes place on battlefields similar to Dynasty Warriors, demanding strategic slaying of Empire soldiers. As with any self-respecting evil fantasy regime, the Empire has monsters many times more despicable than dragons fighting among its ranks. Early slayage against scores of human adversaries is merely a warm up for trials against the likes of ogres and trolls.

"Dynasty Warriors has a similar cinematic appeal to the Final Fantasy series – which also sells well [in Japan]", Director Taro Yokoo told CVG. "Drakengard benefited from this combination of game styles and also in that there's certain, obvious irony involved in the way Drakengard takes the Dynasty Warriors idea and expands it."

MY OTHER SWORD IS A TROLL CLEAVER

While visually the Dynasty Warriors series has already surpassed where Drakengard is at on the battlefield, Drakengard develops the concept with 64 collectible weapon types. All of them upgrade through four incarnations with experience, and each one empowers Caim with a unique magic attack. You only tap the X button to hack away at foes, but the rhythm of the blows depends entirely on the size, weight and style of the blade. Although no weapon is more or less effective against enemy types (you don't require fire-type blades to increase damage against ice-type enemies for example), you'll choose weapons suited to your style of attack.

"Some weapons may help you more than others, but you can kill any boss with any weapon" Shiba told us. Lances are great for charging into crowds, causing a wave effect upon impact, flooring smaller enemies within range. Broadswords are slow, but take down lots of foes with one stroke. Then again, you might be someone who likes to dive in stabbing away with daggers for big-hit combos, and that's useful for magic and EXP.

BANGS FOR YOUR BUCK

The EXP required to upgrade weapons feeds off the number of hits in a combo. This forces you to adopt a basic level of strategy on the battlefield, and take

Between key stages you're often treated to thrilling cutscenes

Even though the screen is swarming with enemy soldiers there is rarely any slow down

Magic used during a dog-fight strikes multiple targets to defend you on all sides

Your dragon evolves with experience. Revisit previous stages to exploit his new strength

pleasure in avoiding being hit beyond just staying healthy. Magic attacks also reflect the size of the combo with the strength of their effect – the longer you can hold out, the bigger the benefit.

Caim can also summon Seree, Leonard or the widow Arioch to assist him briefly if things get extra tight... which they often do. This bears a slight resemblance to the Summon Beasts in Final Fantasy, as each character brings their pact beast to make a huge impact.

Whereas Caim has formed a pact with a dragon, his companions are partnered with the likes of trolls and other mythical creatures.

OKAY SO IT ISN'T A DOG... BUT IT SURE CAN FIGHT

Ever seen dogs flying through the air looping-da-loop and barrel-rolling to get a stronger bite on each other's necks? Neither have we. Anyhow, there's a whole lot of dogfighting in store for Caim and his dragon in the airborne gameplay mode, which resembles Sega's Panzer Dragoon.

Just as the melee mode expands the Dynasty Warriors concept, aerial battles give more freedom to manoeuvre than in Panzer. In Japan, it has been "the dragon's strength and the ability to call upon his ferocious attacks", according to Line Director Iwasaki, that has been half the reason for the game's success.

CLIMB ON DRAGOON

If you've played Panzer Dragoon you'll be right at home controlling the dragon. Attacks combine single rapid-fire shots best suited for targeting specific points, plus a lock-on mode for multiple-targets requiring less damage. A limited number of magic strikes are also available in each stage, best reserved for boss battles or if caught in a crossfire.

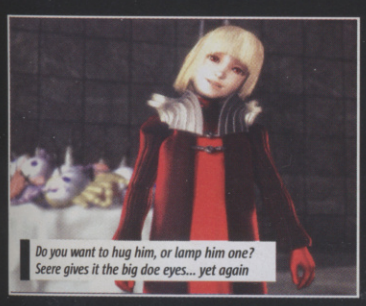
Drakengard mainly differs from Panzer in that you have a 360° control, meaning that you can fly away from foes toward the screen instead of heading forward the whole time. This allows you to go back for targets you may have missed so that you can max out the combo hits and gather EXP for the dragon to evolve into ever more powerful forms.

Just as Caim's weapons upgrade, the dragon goes through three forms throughout the game, becoming very, VERY impressive indeed later on.

"If you've played Panzer Dragoon you'll be right at home controlling the dragon"

Melee battles aren't as impressive as Dynasty Warriors, but the magic makes them more fun

Everyone has a pact beast. Seere's is this ugly Golem, believe it or not!

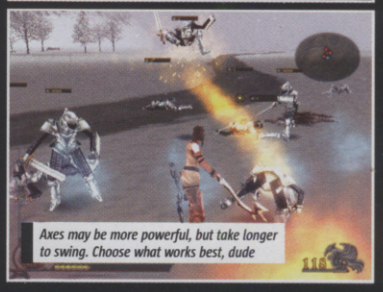

Do you want to hug him, or lamp him one? Seere gives it the big doe eyes... yet again

BIGGER THINGS

Following respectable sales in Japan and a growing interest in the US, Square-Enix seems sure to continue the Drakengard saga in the future. There's a comic-book series running in one of Japan's largest magazines ('Gan-Gan'), and the possibility of the game coming to other formats is being considered.

"If it's successful worldwide then we'd like to launch more titles," Shiba told us. "The general feeling is Drakengard could well develop into a series." Of course this is going to be down to you, the players, but we think you'll take Drakengard to heart if not for its dark fantasy undertones, then for its ambitious approach. Look out next month for our opinion on the final UK code. ✷

Take out the mages before laying into the infantry, else you'll be in a real mess


Axes may be more powerful, but take longer to swing. Choose what works best, dude

"Make sure you get it"
"★★★★★"
Maxim

"This is one viciously involving mother of a ride."
Loaded

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Win a PS2 AND an Xbox! Fill your bedroom with barbarian console power!

You've got to love Conan. Honestly, you do, because if you don't we'll tell him and he'll come round your house and beat you up. He's massive and he's got more muscles than a seafood restaurant.

See, we've got mates at TDK, and they've just released Conan: The Dark Axe on PS2, Xbox, Gamecube, and PC. To celebrate we've put together a prize package that packs more punch than both of the big guy's biceps put together. Two lucky winners will scoop the ultimate console power package – a PS2 AND an Xbox each, a copy of Conan, a bunch of other games and a limited edition Conan mini-sword for slaying devilish beasts! Or picking your arse.

But remember, the pen is mightier than the sword, so get your mitts on one and fill in the coupon or text us your answer! ✶

CONAN CONSOLE CARNAGE!

PRIZE CONAN-ZA!

WIN ALL THIS!

Two first prize winners each get this lot – an Xbox plus a PS2, a copy of Conan: The Dark Axe on Xbox, a copy of Outlaw Volleyball on PS2, a copy of Knights Of The Temple on Xbox, a Knights Of The Temple T-shirt, and a super slick Conan mini-sword!

As if that hoard of mighty treasure wasn't enough, we've also got loot for three runners-up. They'll walk away with a copy of Conan: The Dark Axe on Xbox, a copy of Outlaw Volleyball on PS2, a Knights Of The Temple T-shirt and a Conan mini-sword. Prizes of justice!

TO WIN: SPOT CONAN'S FILTHY LOVE HUT!

There's a bit in the Conan film where he's in a hut and he's about to get it on with a really fit bird and then she turns into a right munting old witch. It's happened to us all. It doesn't happen in the game, but one of these screenshots has some likely looking huts... Just tell us which one and you're in with the chance of scooping the loot!

A

"Me Conan! Me must kill indigenous tribesmen so I can check those huts for sexy chicks"

B

"Conan not see any hot slappers round here, only plenty of boners. Sorry, me mean bones"

C

"This suck. No loose birds around anywhere. Conan might have to exercise his own muscle"

YOU'VE GOT TO BE IN IT TO WIN IT

Tick one of the following boxes

A.☐ B.☐ C.☐

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★FORENAME: .....

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REVIEWS

FULLY INDEPENDENT & MULTIFORMAT ✶ TRUST NO ONE ELSE

Ninja Gaiden
Our Paul fashions a Ninja hood from his favourite Von Bondies T-shirt and settles in for a long slog with Xbox's essential stealth slasher

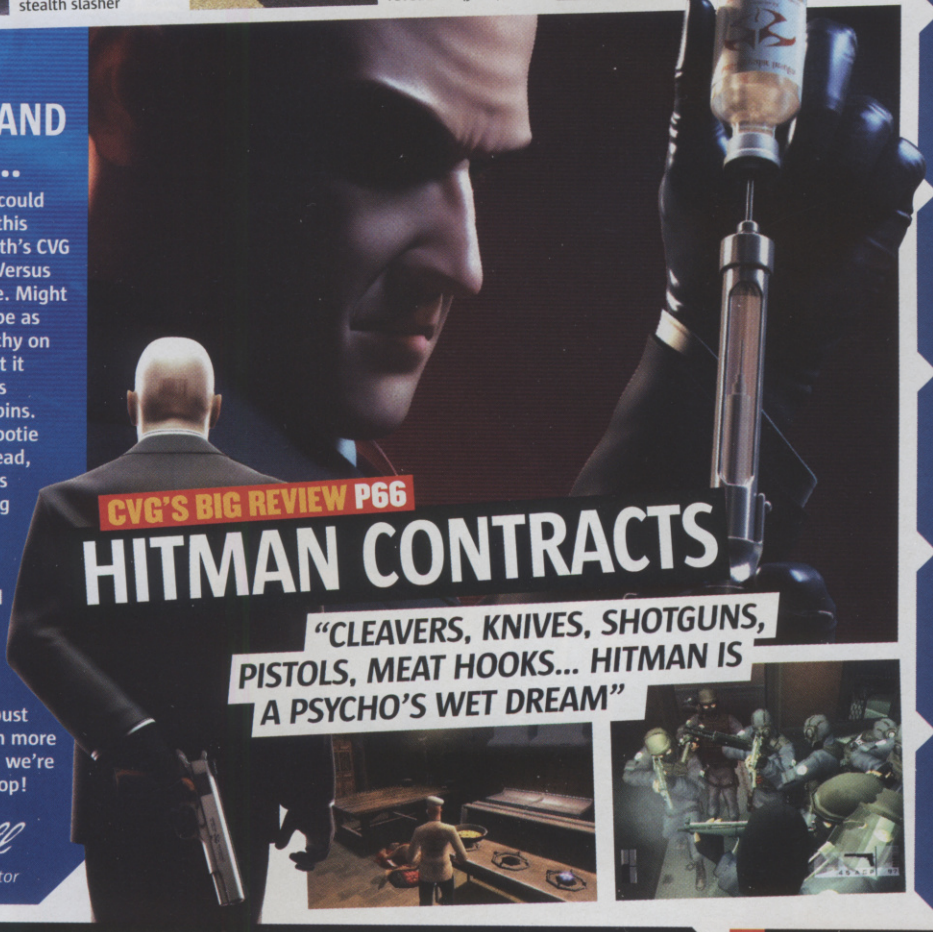
TOCA Race Driver 2
Only on PC and Xbox, is this latest TOCA 'two' good for PS2 players? Will it make 'em sick that GT4 STILL isn't here? Graeme reveals all (yuk!)

Galleon
We walk the plank with the biggest adventure surprise of the year so far. All together now: We are sailing! We are sailing!

COMPARE AND CONTRAST...

You could call this month's CVG the Versus Issue. Might not be as punchy on the shop shelves, but it sums up much of this month's review gubbins. Euro 2004 licensed footie games go head to head, big name Xbox racers rev up on the starting grid, and there are so many ninjas and samurais battling each other you could get sliced just from reading the pages. It all means one good thing, though: more ace games to bust through and so much more of what we all want, we're spoilt for choice. Woop!

Lee Skittrell
Lee Skittrell *Reviews Editor*



CVG'S BIG REVIEW P66

HITMAN CONTRACTS

"CLEAVERS, KNIVES, SHOTGUNS, PISTOLS, MEAT HOOKS... HITMAN IS A PSYCHO'S WET DREAM"

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PS2

HOW CVG'S REVIEWS WORK

CVG's reviews are the most accurate, informative and downright honest you'll ever read. Here's why...

CVG VERDICT BOX

GRAPHICS
How sharp it looks, smoothly it moves, how good the effects are... That's all covered here

SOUND
Does the sound, whether it's ambient noise or a killer soundtrack, complement the game? If so, expect a high score

GAMEPLAY
Is it fun, fresh and addictive as hell? If a game scores well here, we guarantee it's great fun to play

LASTING APPEAL
It may be great fun, but is it all over in a flash? Or will it last for months?

HOW IT COMPARES
... to games you've probably already played. The longer the bar, the better the game. Simple.

OVERALL
Taking everything into account, is it actually any good? *(Note: this is not an average of the other scores)*

CVG SCORES

By popular demand, CVG has switched to percentages to bring you the most precisely calculated scores ever!

95+ DIAMOND Award

90-94+ GOLD Award

85-89+ SILVER Award

75-84+ You'd be pleased to get this as a gift, though next month you'll probably forget you own it.

65-74+ Some fun to be had but one best bought by your mate so you can get a lend of it.

55-64+ A pretty average game that's unlikely to set the gaming world on fire on any level.

41-54+ You really shouldn't even consider renting one of these, let alone buying one.

UNDER 40 STINKER Award

THE CVG AWARDS SYSTEM

We score everything out of 100, to give you the most accurate reviews ever. And if a game is exceptional, we'll give it an Award, so you know what a diamond game it is...

DIAMOND Award
The most coveted award a game can get. It's worth buying the console just to play it!

GOLD Award
A bloody amazing game you've got to own. It's brilliant in almost every respect, so go get it!

SILVER Award
Highly recommended by CVG's experts. May not be anything ground-breaking but it's still ace.

STINKER Award
More abominable than a reality TV show, set in a barbers, called "I'm a Yeti..."

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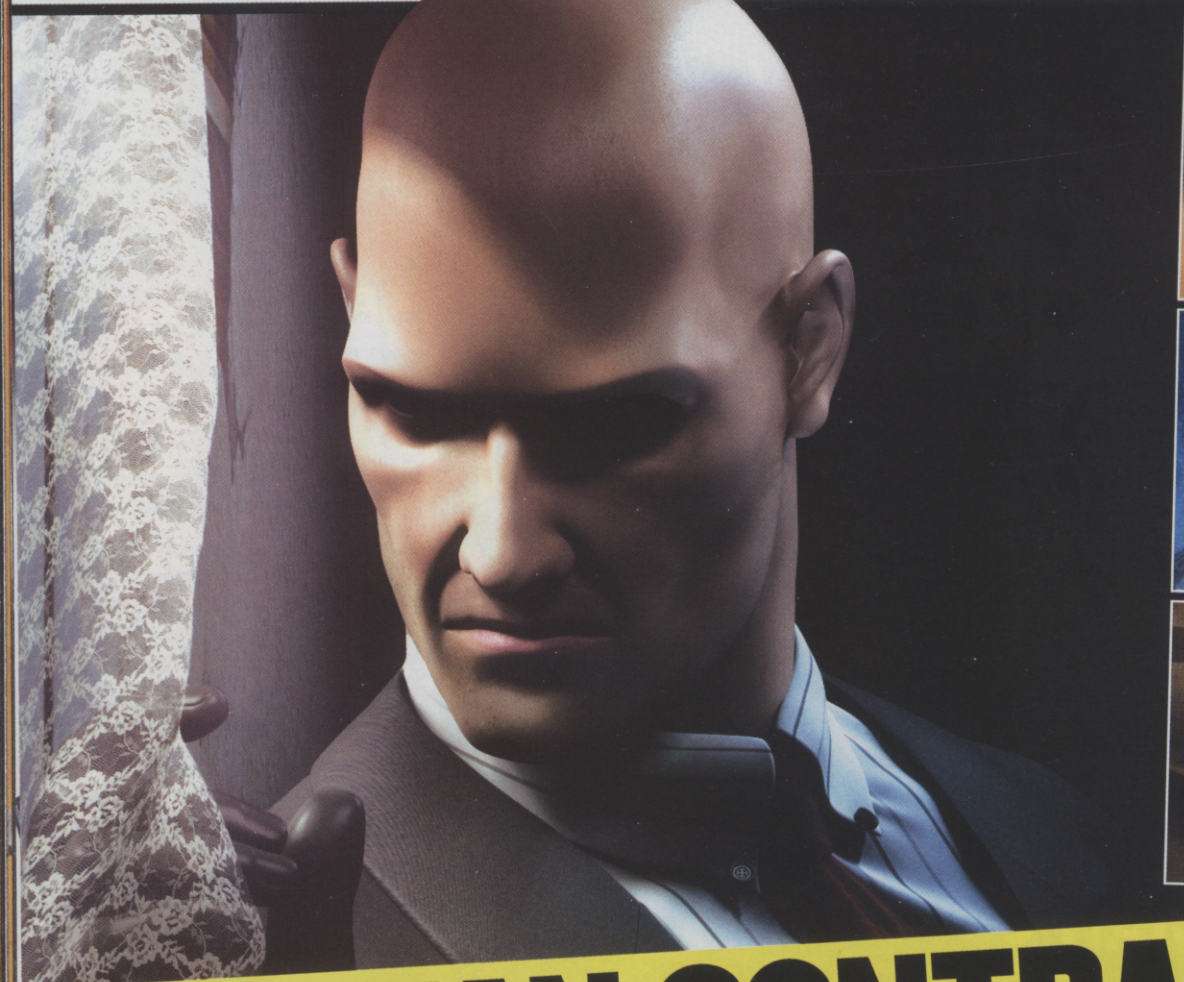
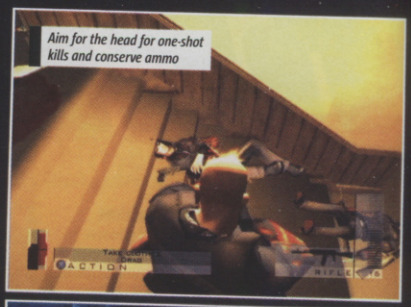
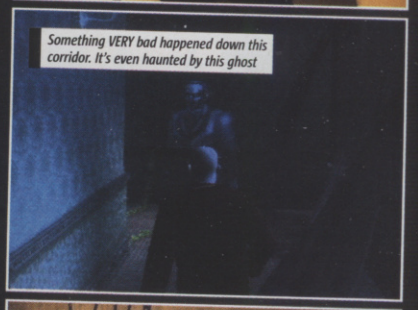
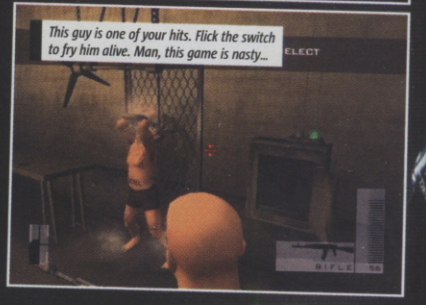




Aim for the head for one-shot kills and conserve ammo



Something VERY bad happened down this corridor. It's even haunted by this ghost



This guy is one of your hits. Flick the switch to fry him alive. Man, this game is nasty...

HITMAN CONTRACTS

Agent 47 shoots, but this time it's wide of the mark

You're a trained killer, a silent assassin who specialises in squeezing the life out of your victims and getting out before the alarm is raised.

Odd, then, that when it actually comes to wrapping the strangle wire round the fat neck of the bloated businessman who's your next target, you're a bit of a clumsy tit. Sneaking up behind him is a breeze but unless you're in EXACTLY the right spot when you go in for the kill, you end up pathetically waving your wire around like some retarded rodeo rider trying to lasso his first bull. The guy you're trying to knock off sees you flailing around from the corner of his eye, raises the alarm, and seconds later tooled-up guards rip into your body with AKs.

I'LL LET MYSELF IN

Walking through the front door won't work most of the time, even with a dead man's raincoat. Get used to making the best of your surroundings.

HITMAN'S GREATEST HITS

So what has Hitman Contracts got going for it then? Well, quite a lot, if you can deal with its flaws. The story, for instance, is more compelling than most. Agent 47 has been set up, his latest hit gone terribly wrong. The game intro unfolds

Looks like they might have noticed you... Still, you have your trusty gun for a reason

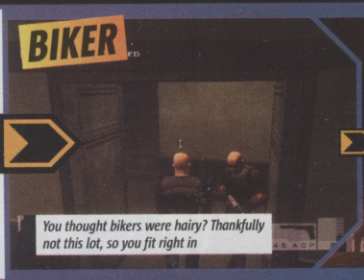
"BLOWN YOUR COVER? ONLY ONE THING FOR IT – FIRE LIKE CRAZY!"

■ While Sam Fisher uses the shadows to kill, Agent 47 favours disguises. We're not talking false noses and glasses either. Instead he

MASKED KILLER

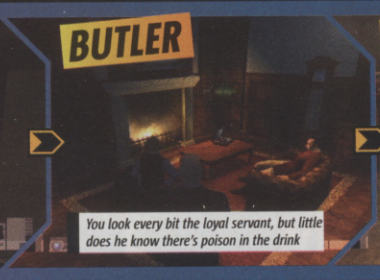
kills his victims then nicks their clothes. And when there are so many people to knock off in each level, that's one big wardrobe...

BIKER



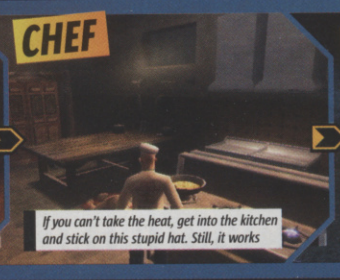
You thought bikers were hairy? Thankfully not this lot, so you fit right in

BUTLER



You look every bit the loyal servant, but little does he know there's poison in the drink

CHEF

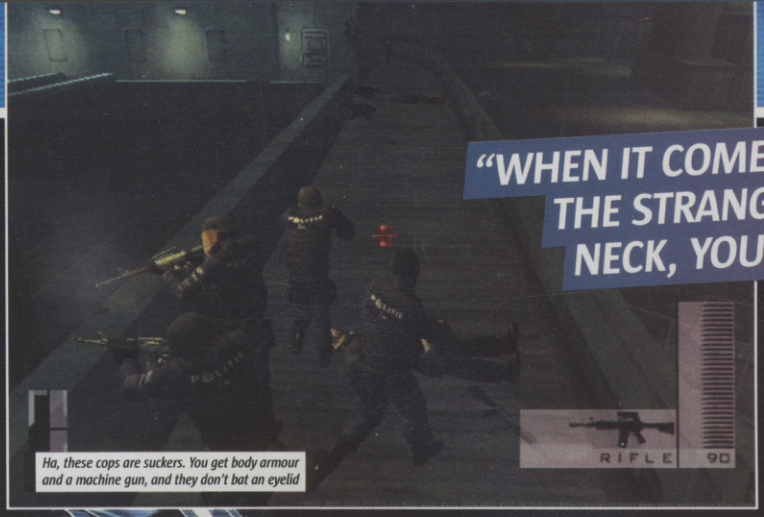


If you can't take the heat, get into the kitchen and stick on this stupid hat. Still, it works

GAME KEEPER

Pop on your flat cap and tweed jacket to blend in at this country manor house

"WHEN IT COMES TO WRAPPING THE STRANGLE WIRE ROUND THE NECK, YOU'RE A CLUMSY TIT"

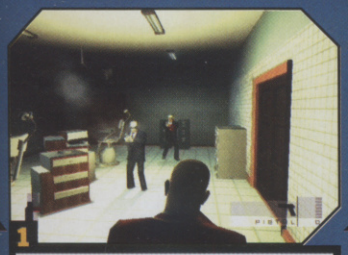


Ha, these cops are suckers. You get body armour and a machine gun, and they don't bat an eyelid

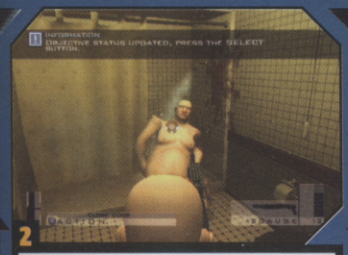
TOOLS OF THE TRADE

You want hardware? You got it. Hitman is packed with cool weapons, from the twin Silverballer pistols Agent 47 starts each mission with, to high-calibre machine guns you nick off the bodies of past kills.

He's resourceful too, and can use kitchen knives to slice his opponents, inject lethal doses with syringes and even bust heads with pool cues! This is no game for the faint of heart.


1

■ *Agent 47's silenced Silverballer pistol is just the ticket for quiet kills. Keep it by your side – always*

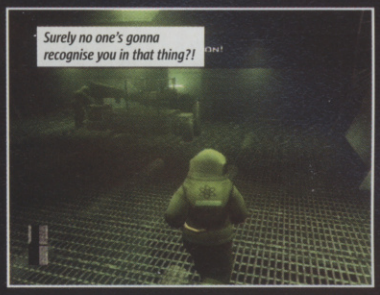

2

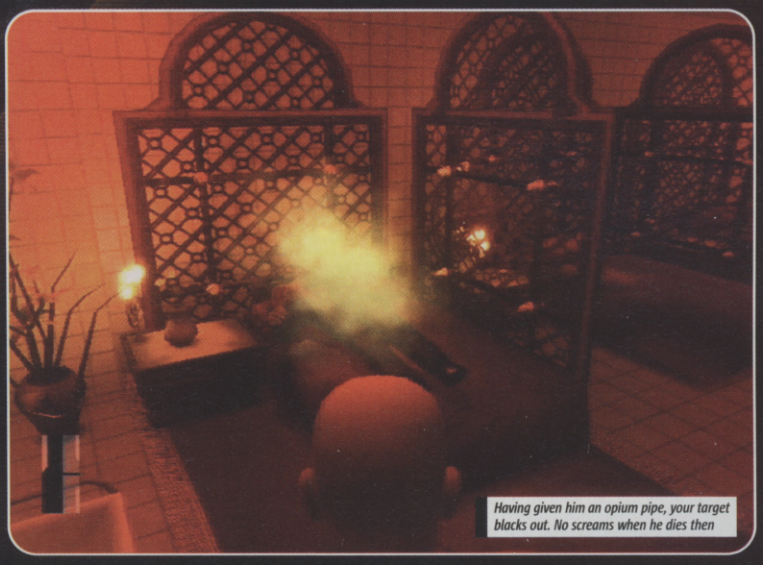
■ *The 12-gauge shotgun is perfect for up-close hits and spatter effects. This guy's dead meat f'sure*

3

■ *Looking like it might be too dangerous to get in close? Stay back and pop heads with the sniper rifle*

Ker-rack! Seven-ball this bastard by wrapping that pool cue round his head


Surely no one's gonna recognise you in that thing?!


Having given him an opium pipe, your target blacks out. No screams when he dies then

with 47 stumbling into his safe house, blood gushing from a bullet wound in his gut. And as he drifts in and out of consciousness he relives his greatest hits – and that's how the missions play out.

Right from the start Hitman's missions and the objectives within are varied, and some are very cleverly designed. It's not simply a case of finding the guy you've got to kill and putting a slug in his face. Take Agent 47's third hit for example: the Russians are constructing dirty bombs in Siberia and you have to infiltrate the submarine base where they're hiding out. First you've got to get in unnoticed, but rather than sticking to shadows and sneaking in like Sam Fisher, Hitman's favoured form of stealth is disguise. And let's face it, if anything is gonna stick out like a sore thumb in a white, icy wasteland, it's a bald bloke wearing a black suit.

FAKE 'TACHE AND SPECS

Best get some thermals, then. You can do this by shooting the nearest guard, but this will raise the alarm. Better to trail one of the bad guys and slip a hefty dose of laxatives into his soup. Then, when he's emptying his arse down the pan, slit his throat and nick his clothes. Nice.

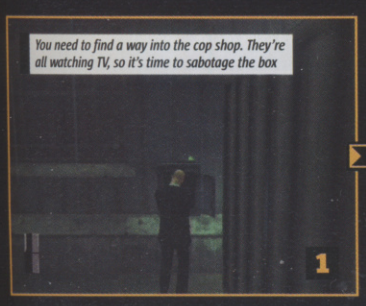
So there you are, walking around the base in a parka caked in blood, and the guards don't bat an eyelid providing you act normally. But while this disguise is enough to get you close enough to kill the Russian commander – using 47's trademark silenced Silverballer pistol rather than the clumsy strangle wire – it won't get you close to the bomb-filled sub.

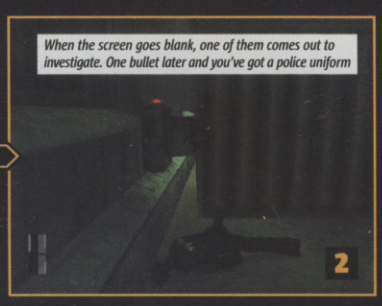
Luckily you're given clues as to what to do next, on the tactical map – which highlights objects of interest as well as the position of enemy guards. So you get a radiation suit, which allows you to get inside the sub and pick up the explosives. Plant these around the base and, as you're making a swift getaway, trigger the remote bombs and BOOM! Mission complete.

NO FAIR!

That's only if everything goes to plan, though. More often than not, it all goes a bit tits up. So rather than everything running smoothly, what usually happens is you change into a disguise but then accidentally bump into a guard. Their alarm meter starts going crazy and, unless you get out of their way fast (but casually, like), your cover is blown and lead starts flying.

Hitman Contracts is unforgiving. Ridiculously so. And because guards are temperamental and some puzzles »


You need to find a way into the cop shop. They're all watching TV, so it's time to sabotage the box
1


When the screen goes blank, one of them comes out to investigate. One bullet later and you've got a police uniform
2

SILENT BUT VIOLENT

You're supposed to get through the missions without enemy guards getting suspicious.

It's unlikely you'll do this first time round because much of it is down to trial and error, finding the right disguise and working out when to use it. But when you do pull it off, it's extremely satisfying.

1

■ *Your objective is to kill the Triad boss inside those gardens, but you can't get in through the front door*

2

■ *Nicking some guy's clothes doesn't help, he's still taking too much notice of you. Take him out, quietly*

3

■ *Good, the coast is clear. Now climb up that handy ladder and make your way onto the roof*

4

■ *This ledge conveniently overlooks the ornamental gardens. Perfect for the sniper rifle, then*

5

■ *Zoom right in on your prey, squeeze the trigger and BLAM! His brains are spattered on the trees. Nice!*

■ You won't finish a mission without your cover being blown – not first time round anyway. So what do you do? Restart, or

YOU WANT A PIECE OF ME?

carry on? If it's the first missions it's probably easier to pick up an AK, switch to first-person mode and let the battle begin.

Things start off well and your first kill passes without the alarm being raised

Bad mistake... You're dressed as a Chinese waiter, but you're not Chinese! D'oh!

Traid thugs bowl in, opening up with AKs. Give 'em some of their own medicine!

In first-person mode, mowing down enemies is a cinch. Only works on easier levels, though

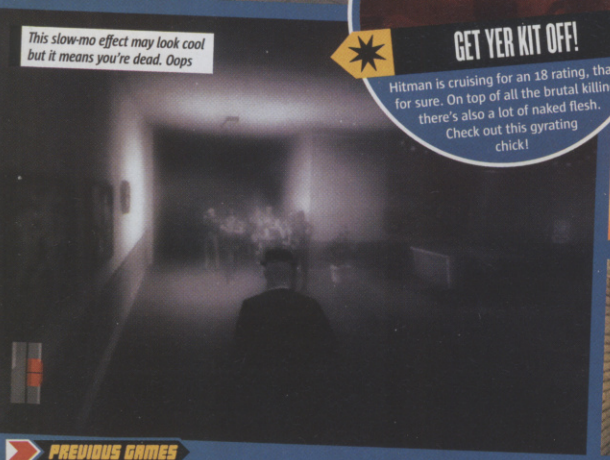
"CLEAVERS, KNIVES, SHOTGUNS, PISTOLS, MEAT HOOKS... HITMAN IS A PSYCHO'S WET DREAM"

The shower scene! But this dizzy bird has forgotten to take her clothes off

GET YER KIT OFF!

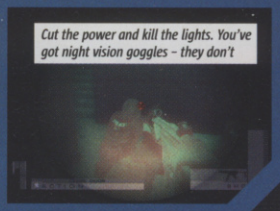
Hitman is cruising for an 18 rating, that's for sure. On top of all the brutal killing, there's also a lot of naked flesh. Check out this gyrating chick!

You hack this fat twat with the meat cleaver but no blood spurts out. Rubbish!

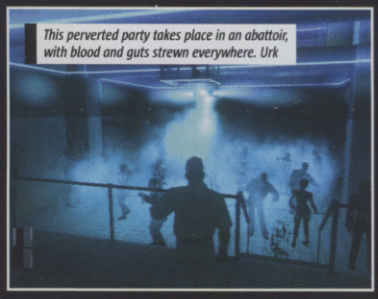


This slow-mo effect may look cool but it means you're dead. Oops

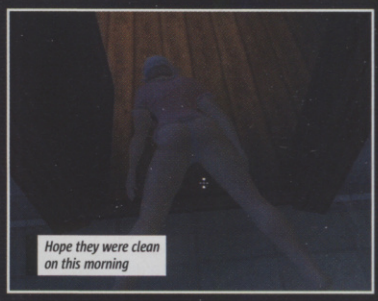
Auto-aim features make ploughing through enemies a breeze



Cut the power and kill the lights. You've got night vision goggles – they don't



This perverted party takes place in an abattoir, with blood and guts strewn everywhere. Urk



Hope they were clean on this morning

PREVIOUS GAMES

■ Hitman: Codename 47, Hitman 2: Silent Assassin, Freedom Fighters

HARD FACTS

■ 12 levels
■ Over 20 different weapons
■ More than one way to complete each mission
■ More moves and better animation compared to Hitman 2

DID YOU KNOW?

■ Serial killer Ted Bundy murdered 22 women between 1973 and 1978. His youngest was just 12 years old. He was executed on 24 January 1989.

solved only through trial and error, it REALLY tests your patience.

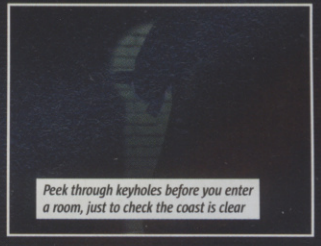
The danger meter provides some help, but it too is unpredictable. A slight blink means nearby guards are checking you out, a violent red flash and they're extremely suspicious – put one foot wrong and your cover is blown.

Problem is, there's very little give between the two, and it can change in an instant without you really knowing why. As a result you sometimes don't feel completely in control.

Hitman Contracts would have benefited hugely from a more sophisticated danger meter, one where you had exact control over your situation, like Splinter Cell's visibility meter. As it is, you can have no idea why the guards are suspicious, so it's not clear how to change the way you're acting.

BLOWN OUT

That said, it is possible to complete levels even after your cover is blown. In fact, we blasted our way through the first couple of missions, forgetting stealth and disguises altogether. But shooting your way through the game in this way is unsatisfying and feels like you're not playing it how it should be played. After all, the point of Hitman is that you kill quickly and silently, and make good your escape. When you're forced to do this in a very restricted way, with little room for error or freedom, a lot of the fun is sapped from the game. Shame, because it could've



Peek through keyholes before you enter a room, just to check the coast is clear

THAT DANGER METER

It bugged us to hell and – believe it – Hitman's danger meter is more annoying than that tit who presents You've Been Framed.

The biggest problem is that it's unpredictable. Like, REALLY unpredictable. So even when you think you're being cautious, wearing the right disguise and acting casually, chances are your cover will still be blown. AAARRGH!

■ Good disguise, and your casual acting's looking alright. These guys don't suspect a thing

■ A porter carrying a chrome briefcase? Looks odd, and the guards start checking you out

■ They spotted a dead body! Your cover is blown – nothing for it but to come out fighting

CVG 2ND OPINION

MIKE

Hitman Contracts oozes style and attitude, with only Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow out-classing it. The scenarios and assassinations are well thought out and dramatic, but it's let down by its woolly stealth system. My cover was blown just too many times for what I reckon were stupid reasons. There's too much trial and error for my taste.

CVG VERDICT

ALEX

GRAPHICS 87
Class visual effects and moody locations make this killer a bit of a looker

SOUND 83
Pulsing heartbeats, the crack of gunfire and screams of agony... Tense and atmospheric

GAMEPLAY 76
Frustrating as hell, this fails to out-stealth Splinter Cell. But some levels are VERY cool

LASTING APPEAL 79
Depends if you can stick its flaws. If so, there's a loads of cool missions to explore

Gritty movie atmosphere and clever storyline fail to outshine the unforgiving gameplay. It's got some great ideas but could've been so much better.

OVERALL SCORE 78

HOW IT COMPARES
SPLINTER CELL: PT
HITMAN CONTRACTS
METAL GEAR SOLID 2

RELEASE DATE
18 JUNE

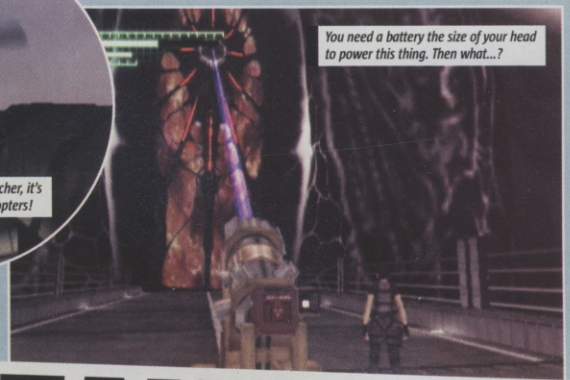
GAME INFO
COST: £39.99
PLAYERS: 1

CONTACT INFO
- PUB: EA
- DEV: NAMCO
- WWW.PROJECT-BREAKDOWN.COM
- CONTACT: 0870 243 2435

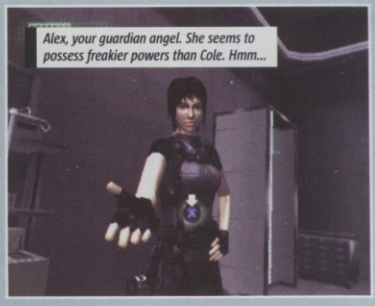
XBOX

If only there were an easy way to help your buddy out of this. Sadly it involves fighting!

Break out the rocket-launcher, it's time to play Kill All Helicopters!



You need a battery the size of your head to power this thing. Then what...?



Alex, your guardian angel. She seems to possess freakier powers than Cole. Hmm...

BREAKDOWN

Hits you right between the eyes

We've had this on the go since January, playing the Japanese version since its release. The game has received a fair amount of gloomy press from some sources, and positively glowing from others (Japan's official Xbox magazine loved it).

We're sticking by our original impressions to say we think Breakdown is the business. It has a strong original concept that handles well, and in some instances makes a fine job of making your Xbox look cooler than a PS2. That's never a bad thing.

PREVIOUS GAMES
- R: Evolution
- Soulcalibur 2
- Tekken 4

HARD FACTS
- Over 15 different combat moves
- Around 20 hours of gameplay
- AI has been tweaked for this Euro release

DID YOU KNOW?
- Dr T. Langen is Assistant Professor of Biology and Psychology at Clarkson University, USA. We doubt he invented a mutating super-drug though!

DUCKING AND DIVING

Something else you should know about Cole: he's a genetically enhanced super-being!

He's the unwitting survivor of Government experiments with the drug T'langen derived from top secret (alien!) sources. The more he ups the dosage, the stronger he gets, but the side effects mess with his mind. But, so what, when you punch so hard guys crash into walls 100ft away!

1 You'll love the smacking sound when you boff T'Langen Warriors smart on the chin

2 When you strike these Warriors, their protective shields soften the blows. Bah and, indeed, bugger!

3 This is the rather sparky Solus. He ate all the T'Langen pies and now someone's gotta suffer

It says Game Over on that rocket back there. You'd like to think so for Solus but...

THROUGH THE EYES OF A KILLER

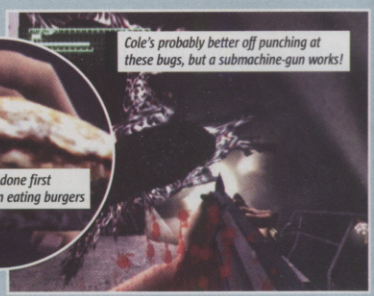
Central to the debate is the first-person action-hero concept. As ex-US Marine, Derrick Cole, you're not just first-person shooting, you're also first-person beating the crap out of things, and trying to navigate tricky environments.

All of which is a disorienting experience that takes time to get comfortable with, but one that works fine overall. You feel trapped inside Derrick Cole's head, with your arms and legs slotted into his, dealing first-hand with whatever's in front of him.

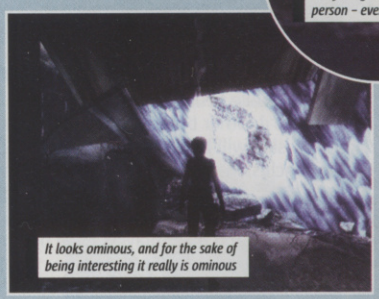
Punches and kicks are landed using a combination of L and R trigger inputs, plus run and jump. Given time you'll be backflipping out of danger, cartwheeling among enemies in a crowded room, and sliding in to take out legs or rise into devastating uppercuts.

Breakdown is gobsmacking when the plan comes together, but a bit wobbly too when it doesn't.

Everything is done first person – even eating burgers

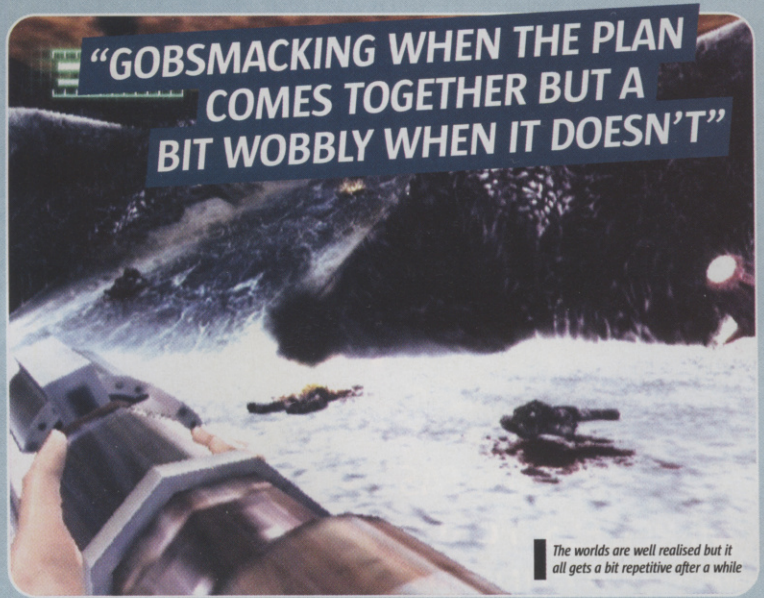


Cole's probably better off punching at these bugs, but a submachine-gun works!



It looks ominous, and for the sake of being interesting it really is ominous

"GOBSMACKING WHEN THE PLAN COMES TOGETHER BUT A BIT WOBBLY WHEN IT DOESN'T"



The worlds are well realised but it all gets a bit repetitive after a while

TAKE IT LYING DOWN

Since absolutely everything is handled from a first-person view, there have been times when we've felt kind of travel sick while playing. Bearing in mind that we've played many FPSs in our time, this came as a shock! Each time you go to press a button or open a door, Derrick sways back and forwards in an exaggerated manner. Pick something up and Derrick insists on giving it a quick once over, and you cannot skip the animation. There are lots of buttons, doors, and items to interact with in Breakdown so you can understand how this gets frustrating.

Yet, you take this all on the chin because the level design and overall artistic quality of alien beings and their worlds is high. Cole's mission may drag at times and some areas are very repetitive, but it is always enthralling. ✶

PAUL

CVG VERDICT

GRAPHICS 8?
Enemies are superb, with subtle use of Xbox SFX. Mostly very realistic, but repeated areas

SOUND 8?
Nice swishing and whomping with punches and kicks. Dramatic music is all on cue too

GAMEPLAY 7?
Sometimes awkward, but the action is on the whole great. Repetitive, but not much

LASTING APPEAL 7?
It's big and you'll want to replay early levels once you've cracked fighting in first-person

Rated highly because of its rather unique and successful adaptation of first-person fisticuffs, but not TOO highly as it struggles sometimes.

OVERALL SCORE 80

HOW IT COMPARES
- FIGHT NIGHT 2004
- BREAKDOWN
- HALO

RELEASE DATE
14 MAY

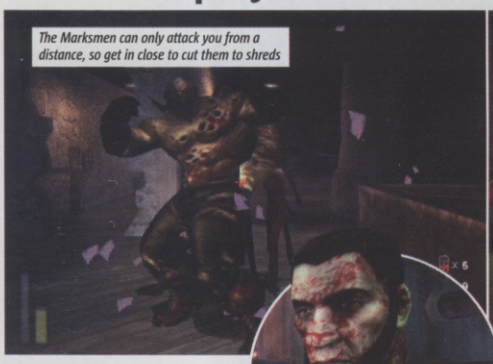
GAME INFO
COST: £39.99
PLAYERS: 1

CONTACT INFO
- PUB: MIDWAY
- DEV: SURREAL SOFWARE
- WWW.THESUFFERING.MIDWAY.COM
- CONTACT: 020 7938 4488

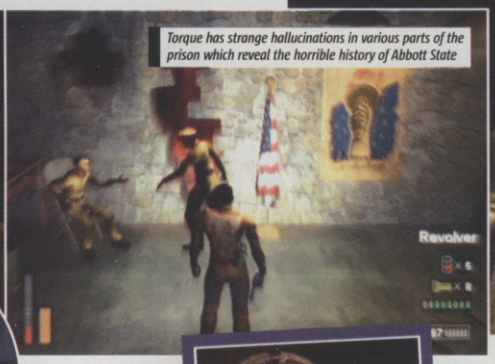
THE SUFFERING

To hell with Resident Evil – play something REALLY scary!

The smarter Slayers can use their massive blades to deflect bullets



The Marksmen can only attack you from a distance, so get in close to cut them to shreds



Torque has strange hallucinations in various parts of the prison which reveal the horrible history of Abbott State

Nice hair cut matey – it's a short, back and INSIDES

When Resident Evil first loosened bowels back in 1996, it also established a formula that all Survival Horror games have stuck to ever since – snail-paced action, brain-twisting puzzles and a severe lack of ammunition to tackle the horrors lurking in the shadows. Thankfully, The Suffering dares to be different.

Unlike established horror games such as Silent Hill, Forbidden Siren and Project Zero, The Suffering puts its emphasis on gun-blazing action rather than methodical puzzle-solving. But even though it plays more like a first-person shooter than a traditional horror game, The Suffering is still one of the scariest and most disturbing adventures on the shelves.

PRISON IS HELL

The twisted story is set in Abbott State Penitentiary, a maximum security prison where dangerous criminals are sent to spend their final days on death row. The hero of the game – a surly inmate called Torque whose sideburns would make Wolverine jealous – has been sent down for the brutal murder of his wife and kids, but still protests his innocence as he waits for his fatal trip to the electric chair.

For the first half-hour of the game, The Suffering cranks up the tension to almost unbearable levels – unseen monsters slaughter fellow inmates, disembowelled bodies are strewn around the claustrophobic corridors and Torque has horrifying flashbacks and hallucinations that slowly reveal his mysterious past.

The story is also cool as the decisions players make can lead to one of three alternative endings – helping hapless guards and fellow prisoners, for example, will lead to a happy and satisfying resolution, while acting like a badass who'd rather butcher a screw than save their skin will lead to a somewhat darker conclusion.

GUN TOTIN' ACTION

Once the story and main players have been established, though, The Suffering completely changes pace. Unlike Resident Evil where every bullet is precious, all manner of weapons and guns can be found scattered around the prison – which is just as well, as the dank corridors are home to some of the scariest monsters ever seen in a videogame.

While Resident Evil fans are used to slow-moving enemies that can be dodged to conserve ammo, the creatures in The Suffering are fast and vicious, forcing Torque to keep his

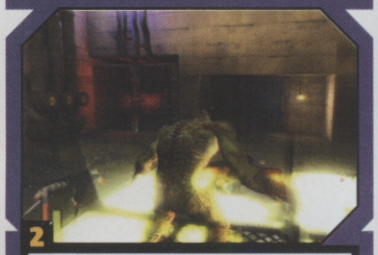
The Slayers will stop at nothing to catch you, and will even smash through bullet proof glass to reach Torque

TORQUE OF THE DEVIL

Although Torque has plenty of guns at his disposal, the brooding hero can also transform into a hulking demon that can chop down waves of enemies in a flash.

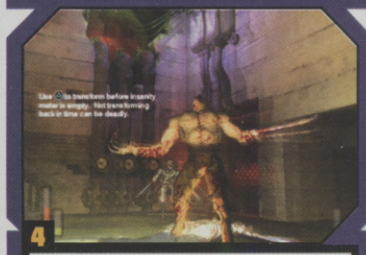
Torque can only transform once his insanity meter is flashing, and players must remember to change back before the meter drains or Torque will be well and truly wrenched (geddit!?).

1 ■ As he encounters new monsters and takes damage, Torque's insanity meter keeps on filling up

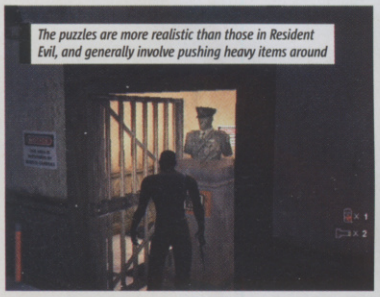


2 ■ Once the meter begins to flash, Torque can transform into this demon form and raise some real hell

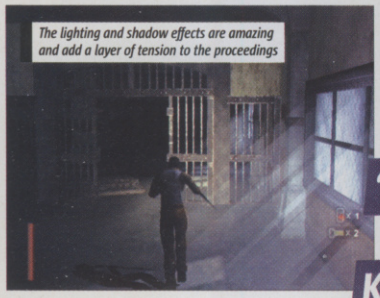
3 ■ Now the transformed Torque can rampage across a room and kill everything that stands in his way



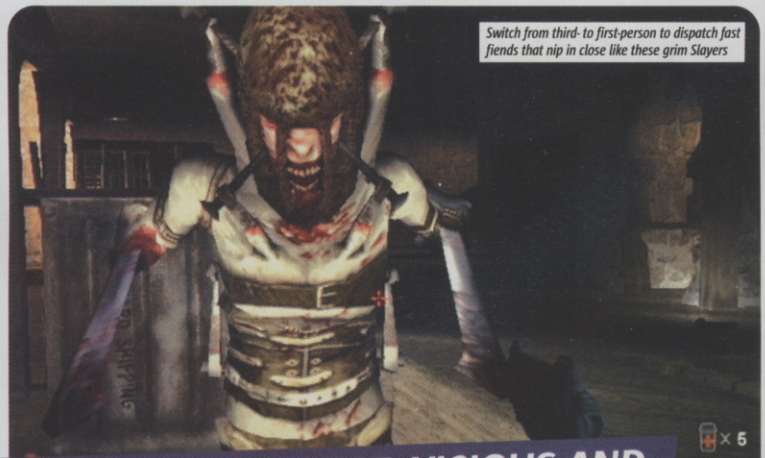
4 ■ Just keep an eye on the nut bar – if it runs out while Torque is a still a monster, he's deader than camo kecks



The puzzles are more realistic than those in Resident Evil, and generally involve pushing heavy items around



The lighting and shadow effects are amazing and add a layer of tension to the proceedings



Switch from third- to first-person to dispatch fast fiends that nip in close like these grim Slayers

"CREATURES ARE FAST, VICIOUS AND MERCILESS, FORCING PLAYERS TO KEEP THEIR GUNS BLAZING AT ALL TIMES"

■ Unlike Resident Evil and Silent Hill, which rely on a creepy atmosphere to unsettle players, this doesn't pull any punches

GORE 'N' GUTS GALORE

on the gore. Instead, it sprays gallons of blood across the screen and even seems to take pride in its ultra-violent action. Yum!

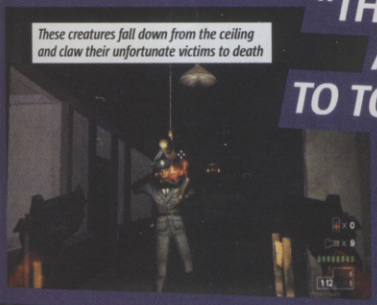
Shortly after escaping from his prison cell, Torque comes across a guard who begs for help

As they speak, an unseen monster plunges a blade straight through the guard's chest

To finish off, the beast picks the guard up and bats his corpse against the metal bars

As the bars rattle and shake, blood sprays across the corridor and soaks Torque. Yuck!

"THE SCARIEST THING ABOUT THE SOUND ARE GHOSTLY VOICES THAT WHISPER TO TORQUE AS HE EXPLORES"

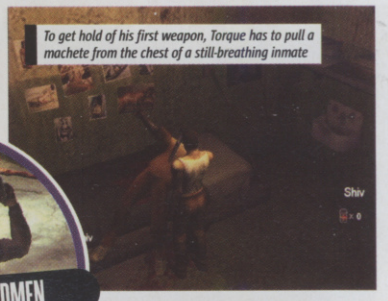


These creatures fall down from the ceiling and claw their unfortunate victims to death

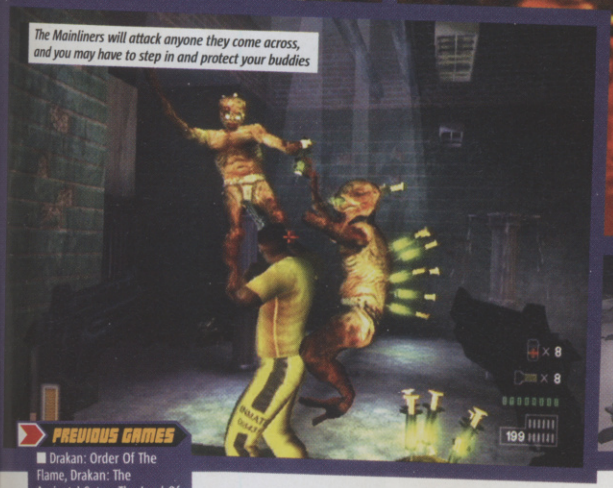
As he explores the prison, Torque is haunted is horrifying flashbacks that gradually reveal his violent past

MAINLINING MADMEN

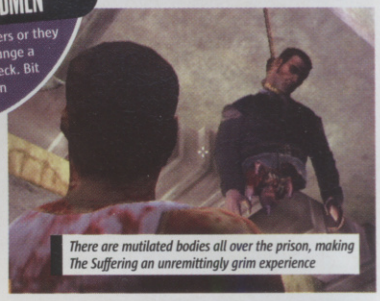
Don't get cornered by Mainliners or they jump on your back and plunge a poisoned needle in your neck. Bit like being mugged in Kings Cross.



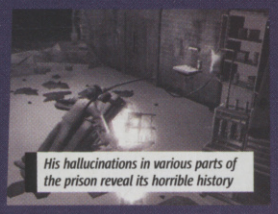
To get hold of his first weapon, Torque has to pull a machete from the chest of a still-breathing inmate



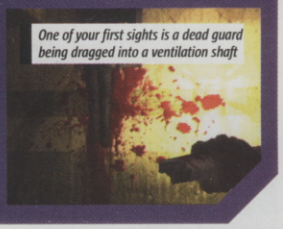
The Mainliners will attack anyone they come across, and you may have to step in and protect your buddies



There are mutilated bodies all over the prison, making The Suffering an unremittingly grim experience



His hallucinations in various parts of the prison reveal its horrible history



One of your first sights is a dead guard being dragged into a ventilation shaft

PREVIOUS GAMES

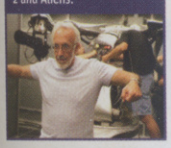
■ Drakan: Order Of The Flame, Drakan: The Ancients' Gates, The Lord Of The Rings: The Fellowship Of The Ring

HARD FACTS

■ The developers reckon The Suffering has 10 hours of gameplay
■ There are three alternative endings
■ There's tons of foul language in the game, so it's definitely not for the mummy-cuddling player

DID YOU KNOW?

■ Stan Winston – whose studio designed the nightmarish beasts for The Suffering – also created the monsters for a series of Hollywood creature features including Predator 2 and Aliens.



guns blazing away at all times for fending the fiends away.

To make gunplay easier, you can play from either first- or third-person perspective. When faced with a swarm of Slayers it's often easier to switch to Torque's viewpoint and pump them full of lead as they hurtle towards you, but in a room full of needle-hurling Mainliners it's best to stick with the normal view to spot missiles flying in the hero's direction.

Kill this screw or obey him? Let the voices in your head decide

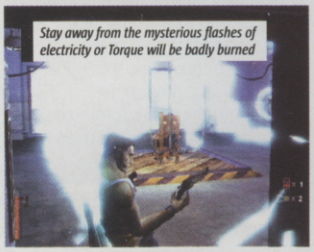
SOUND AS A POUND

Even though the monsters are gruesome and the action is frantic, the best thing about The Suffering is the sound.

As the prison is so damned dark, listening out for nearby enemies is often the only way to survive. Slayers, for example, have razor-sharp machetes for hands and feet, and often lurk in larger rooms – it's truly terrifying to hear their blades scraping against the stone floors as they close in for the kill.

But the scariest thing about the sound are the ghostly voices that whisper to Torque as he explores, one trying to convince him to do the honourable thing and protect the people he meets, the other telling him to ignore everyone else and just look after himself. As the game unfolds these ghostly voices are explained, but at the start of the adventure they're more likely to make you play with the lights on than be at all comforting.

Overall, The Suffering is like a breath of fresh air in the Survival Horror genre. Granted, the action can become repetitive and the blasting would have been improved with a wider selection of monsters to kill. But as an attempt to take horror gaming in a new direction, this is a scarily good achievement.✷



Stay away from the mysterious flashes of electricity or Torque will be badly burned

CVG 2ND OPINION

This is the stuff! Horrible imagery, terrifying sounds and gameplay so visceral it shreds the skin from your bones. It's one of the best horror games I've played in ages because it's damned scary but also remains amazingly good fun to play. Unlike Project Zero 2 or Silent Hill 3 which are too disturbing to be called entertainment. It's the skinned helldog's bollox.

DAVE

CVG VERDICT

GRAPHICS 85
Fabulous lighting and brilliant monsters make for a great looking game

SOUND 91
Creepy sound effects and ghostly voices make The Suffering super scary

GAMEPLAY 76
Fast-paced action is tremendous fun, but it can feel repetitive after a few hours

LASTING APPEAL 82
Multiple endings make it worth playing through at least twice

A truly terrifying adventure that, while certainly not perfect, still brings a real sense of panic and dread back to the weary survival horror genre.

OVERALL SCORE 84

HOW IT COMPARES
THE SUFFERING
SILENT HILL 3
RESIDENT EVIL

DO THE MONSTER MASH

Unlike Resident Evil's dumbass zombies, the monsters in The Suffering are imaginative, beautifully designed and deeply disturbing.

Each creature – created by Stan Winston Studios of Aliens, Predator 2, Terminator 3 and The Thing fame – is based on a method of execution, and each has its own attack pattern that Torque must learn if he wants to escape the penitentiary in one piece.

■ The Slayer (death by decapitation) has machete limbs and spins through the air like a twister to dice victims up

■ The Mainliner (death by lethal injection) throws needles filled with glowing poison to weaken its enemies

■ Marksmen (execution by firing squad) and have guns in their backs that spray Torque with bullets

RELEASE DATE: 7 MAY

GAME INFO: COST: £39.99 PLAYERS: 1-4

CONTACT INFO
- PUB: EA
- DEV: EA
- WWW.EA.COM
- CONTACT: 08702 432435

UEFA EURO 2004

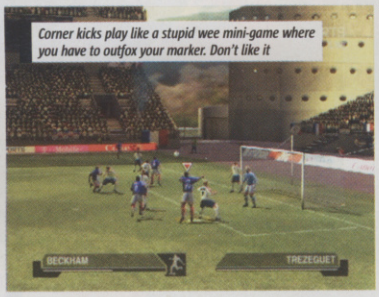
We love Pro Evo so it's hard to say but... it's not half bad, this

Fantasy mode is another brilliant addition – you get to pick your team, schoolyard-style, from any player in the game

Even with fancy moves it's tough to go past defenders – they seem to have an unfair advantage

"A BOOT IN THE BALLS FOR ANYONE WHO ACCUSES EA OF RUSHING OUT A SHALLOW CASH-IN"

EA has emphasised flashy football so expect lots of diving headers and bicycle kicks



Corner kicks play like a stupid wee mini-game where you have to outfox your marker. Don't like it

The new fake shot – handy for shaking defenders out of their boots and wrong-footing keepers

SCOT THE LOT

The apocalypse is coming. EA has actually acknowledged some criticism. While FIFA World Cup 2002 was a half-arsed cash-in, Euro 2004 has a mode you'll play long after you've ignored your girlfriend for those four glorious, footie-filled weeks.

The International Coach mode lets you choose your squad from 40 eligible players, keep an eye on injuries and morale, then guide your squad through the qualification stages to European glory. Yes, even Scotland.

1 ■ You've got 40 players to construct your squad from. Morale affects performance positively and negatively

2 ■ Once your squad's set, you'll play friendlies and your early qualifying matches against crap teams

3 ■ Then it's time to raise your game for the European Championships! Get in, Paul Lambert!

4 ■ And eventually, if you choose the right players and tactics, you'll guide your nation to glory!

What's more difficult than preventing a bunch of pissed-up footballers from sexually abusing anything in a mini-skirt? Writing a review of a FIFA game without evangelising about Pro Evo.

It's no secret that we worship Konami's masterpiece (three times a day, to be exact), and it can be tough to measure rival football games against such a revered and untouchable benchmark.

Of course, the fact remains that FIFA sells Wembley stadium-loads more than PES, so plenty of folk must dig it. And you know what? After playing Euro 2004 we're beginning to understand why.

First of all, this is the officially licensed game of the UEFA European Championship, so it has all the official teams (except those crazy Dutchies), players, kits, stadiums, and tournament branding. It looks great and call us superficial, but we like it, especially after Pro Evo's player name and kit bastardisation.

This also has a brilliant International Coach mode where you choose any one of the 51 European teams and lead them through the whole campaign. It's an entertaining way to extend the depth of the game, and a boot in the balls for anyone who accuses EA of rushing out a shallow cash-in.

OLÉ!

On the pitch the gameplay's been tweaked just enough to make it feel fresh from FIFA 2004. There are new skill moves and flashy bicycle kicks, diving headers, fake shots, and a new crossing model. It still plays slower and more forcedly strategic than PES, but we were particularly impressed by the intelligent runs and shouts made by our AI team-mates.

So why is it still not as good as PES? It's too slow. It's far too difficult to beat defenders one-on-one. The corner and free kick system is stupidly over-complex. And it lacks the instant reactiveness that makes PES such a joy: there are frustrating moments where you want to poke a loose ball into the net but your player fannies about for too long.

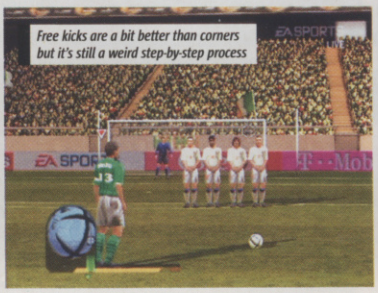
But playing Euro 2004 is a strangely seductive experience, even for hardcore PES fans like us. It's all so official, so slick, so sparkly, and so stylishly smooth while still playing some decent footie that we'll even forgive it for not being PES. Vive 2004! ✷

PREVIOUS GAMES
■ FIFA 2004, Total Club Manager, Madden NFL 2004, NHL 2004

HARD FACTS
■ Number of European teams: 51
■ Number of players per squad: 40
■ Number of players: 2040
■ Number of modes: 12

DID YOU KNOW?
■ 85 goals were scored at Euro 2000 which is about how many we score at CVG's weekly five-a-side and more than any other European Championship before. Goal pie!

Olé! Skill moves are cool but a bit random – you can't really decide which one you want to do



Free kicks are a bit better than corners but it's still a weird step-by-step process

CVG VERDICT

GRAPHICS — 91
We prefer PES's visual style, but you've got to love Euro 2004's fully licensed slickness

SOUND — 89
Motty and Coisty's commentary does the job and the crowd chants and player shouts rock

GAMEPLAY — 74
Lacks the sublime, instant intuitiveness of PES, but it's getting damn close

LASTING APPEAL — 71
Coach mode adds to it, but really this has the same shelf life as the tournament

If you've got FIFA 2004 it's not an essential purchase, but Euro 2004 does capture the sizzling stylishness of top-flight international football. Surprisingly good.

OVERALL SCORE: 79

HOW IT COMPARES
- PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3
- UEFA EURO 2004
- ENGLAND INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL

RELEASE DATE
OUT NOW

GAME INFO
COST: £39.99
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONTACT INFO
* PUB: CODEMASTERS
* DEV: KUJU
* WWW.CODEMASTERS.CO.UK/ENGLAND
* CONTACT: 01926 816044

ONLINE GAMING
* XBOX, 1-2 PLAYER MATCHES

EXTRAS
* XBOX LIVE/HEADSET

The player likenesses are passable. We've kindly blanked out Scholesy's weedy legs for you

You have to aim your shot with the analog stick or it'll go straight to the keeper every time

Dodgy defender AI and ropey collision detection means goalmouth scrambles are common. Not exactly liquid football

Free kicks are awkward – swerve seems pointless and the power bar feels too imprecise

ENGLAND INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL

An experience more like Beckham missing THAT penalty than scoring THAT free kick

ENGLAND UNLOCKS

We're not trying to stick the boot in, but don't let EIF's England branding fool you. You'll get as good an experience with Euro 2004.

In fact, EA's game actually has 15 more English players eligible for the squad than EIF, and its Coach mode puts you much more into Sven's shoes. But you do get some other stuff with EIF, and we list it for you right here...

1 Check it out! Photos! This is what hugely powerful game consoles were made for

2 In an interesting twist, computer Sven is actually far more excitable than real-life Sven

3 Videoclips! These are accessed by progressing through the Championships and tournaments

4 The kit has the World Cup winners' star on it. Apparently. Looks the same as Euro 2004's to us

Scottish? Welsh? Irish? Look away now. We're about to embark on a journey into the land of St George's crosses, that stupid Great Escape tune blaring out of trumpets, and rampant hooliganism.

Only joking. If you're an English football fan, this is the game for you. At least, that's what Codemasters want you to think. England International Football, the national team update of Club Football, is the most nationalistic footie game we've ever seen.

It's licensed by the England team, so you get official kits, photo-modelled players, a motion-captured Sven and unlockable England stuff. In addition, every copy comes with a two-hour DVD about England's journey to Portugal.

PREVIOUS GAMES
- Club Football, LMA Manager

HARD FACTS
- Number of European teams: 22
- Number of non-European teams: 10
- Number of players per squad: 25
- Number of players: 800
- Number of modes: 7

DID YOU KNOW?
- They won the World Cup but England have never got to the final of the European Championship. Scotland, however, have won it seven times. In Graeme's dreams.

BRIT TO THE BONE

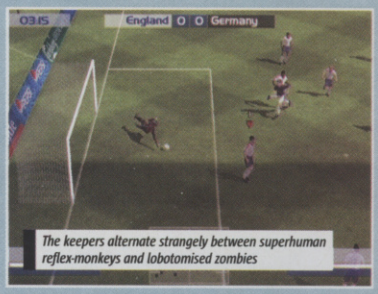
Feeling patriotic? Well, even if you bleed white and red, this'll leave you unsatisfied. FIFA has been in intensive training for Euro 2004; Club Football has been sitting on its arse eating Pringles. It's the exact same game, save for the tweakiest of tweaks, and suffers from the same problems.

Shooting and changing direction are subject to delays. Defender-dazzling flair moves are non-existent. The ball physics are almost as bad as This Is Football 2004's, with mortar trajectories and random changes of speed. Computer-controlled players frequently wander out of bounds. Where are they going? The keepers act weird too, staying on their lines too long and fluffing easy catches. Twice we've seen David James step to the side and let a harmless ball dribble into the goal. Like, what's all that about?

The scope is restrictive too. You can play a non-licensed European Championship or make up your own custom league or cup competition, but that's nothing compared to the pants-down flashiness of Euro 2004.

It's the only Xbox football game you can play online, but like This Is Football, it's not much of an experience. Let's get this straight: we're not going to mark games up just because they have online modes. That's ridiculous. Pro Evo is the pinnacle of multiplayer fun, and EIF doesn't even come close.

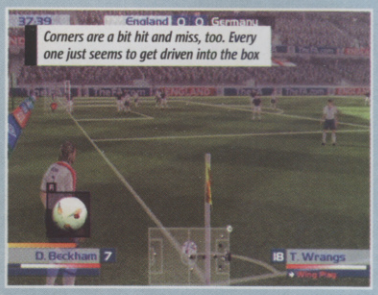
Even with all the St George crosses this is a disappointment. Nationalism's fine, but EIF's all bulldog without the balls. *



The keepers alternate strangely between superhuman reflex-monkeys and lobotomised zombies

"FEELING PATRIOTIC? EVEN IF YOU BLEED WHITE AND RED, THIS'LL LEAVE YOU UNSATISFIED"

You occasionally see an overhead kick or flamboyant volley. John Terry's doing this one. That's just silly



Corners are a bit hit and miss, too. Every one just seems to get driven into the box

GRAEME

CVG VERDICT

GRAPHICS — 57
The player models are all out of proportion and the facial likenesses are poor

SOUND — 76
Can't complain, really. Nice sampled crowd chants and decent commentary from Motto

GAMEPLAY — 58
Superior to This Is Football 2004, but inexcusably basic next to FIFA and PES

LASTING APPEAL — 43
An unofficial European Championship and custom tournaments to keep you going

More English than fish and chips, but without the footie skills to take it to glory – a bit like the actual England team. Germany on penalties, anyone?

OVERALL SCORE 56

HOW IT COMPARES
UEFA EURO 2004
ENGLAND INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL
THIS IS FOOTBALL 2004

RELEASE DATE
12 MAY

GAME INFO
COST: £39.99
PLAYERS: 1

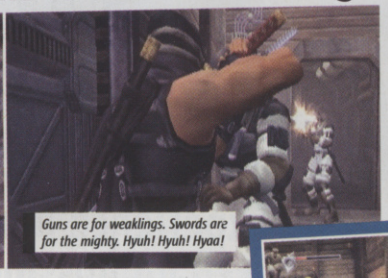
CONTACT INFO
- PUB: TECMO
- DEV: MICROSOFT
- WWW.TECMOINC.COM/GAMES/NG.ASP
- CONTACT: 0870 601 0100

NINJA GAIDEN

Halo is no longer the main reason to own Xbox
This is one hell of a game from Tecmo!

CVG GOLD AWARD

His name is Ryu, and he's not afraid to kick anyone's arse into next Sunday



Guns are for weaklings. Swords are for the mighty. Hyuh! Hyuh! Hyaa!

Feel thirsty? Why not call in at the local for some light refreshments...

A struggle isn't something we're used to on CVG. Dealing is where we're comfortable. Like we dealt with Everything or Nothing, Manhunt, and some dealage going down with Hitman at the time of writing. Ninja Gaiden, though, is a big old struggle. It's as tough as it is amazing to look at – and we mean VERY.

Playing Ninja Gaiden you realise that games can look horny, appeal to the majority, and still pose a hell of a challenge. It always used to be this way before bigger publishers got scared of alienating weak people, and made almost everything manageable to one and all. But traditional CVG maths dictate that a stiff challenge usually equals tasty reward, and Gaiden is the finest example in too long a while.

A MAN-SIZED CHALLENGE

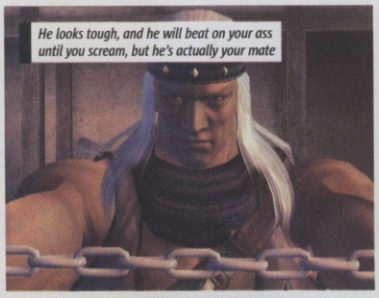
'Hero' games have become so predictable you can almost play them on autopilot. They invariably look wonderful and throw some neat ideas at you but they also suck because you're deprived of a sense of accomplishment.

Gaiden gives you the pleasure of feeling at one with a versatile hero, with hours of practice needed to perfect a dazzling range of techniques. The game wants to defeat you, not the other way around. It smirks as you fail to deal effectively with a handful of modestly equipped ninjas, suggesting that if you can't handle these guys you'll be stuffed further along.

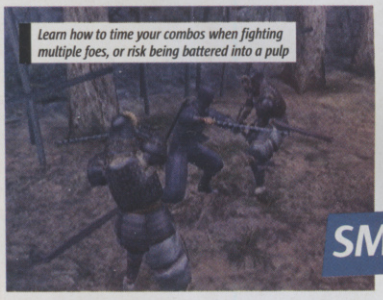
REAL NINJA SMARTS

It's knock-back upon knock-back, until you're strong enough to face up to it. It's the kind of game that has you slamming the pad on the floor in frustration. Yet it gives you such a boost on overcoming every obstacle that you always pick that controller back up, hand trembling for another crack.

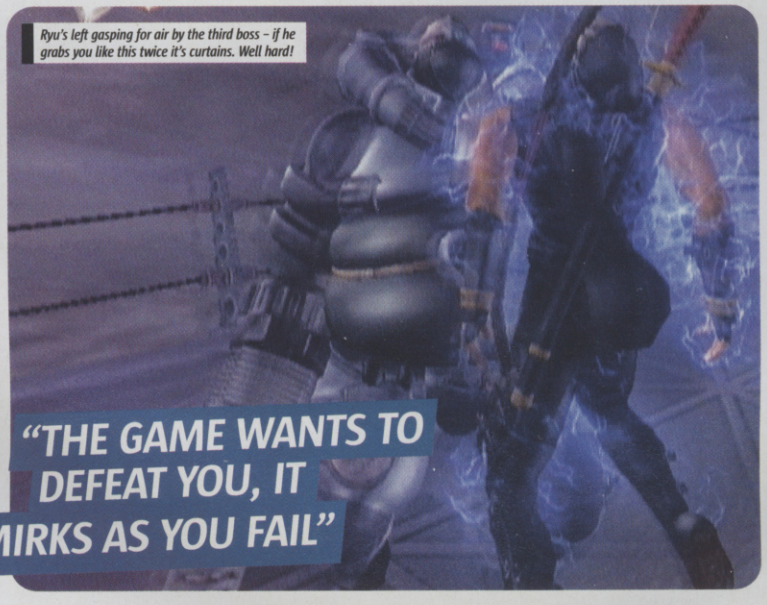
Ryu Hayabusa is a hero type we almost forgot



He looks tough, and he will beat on your ass until you scream, but he's actually your mate



Learn how to time your combos when fighting multiple foes, or risk being battered into a pulp



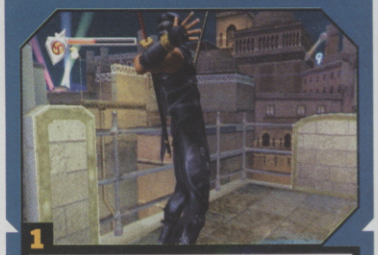
Ryu's left gasping for air by the third boss – if he grabs you like this twice it's curtains. Well hard!

"THE GAME WANTS TO DEFEAT YOU, IT SMIRKS AS YOU FAIL"

GET IT ON WITH GAIDEN

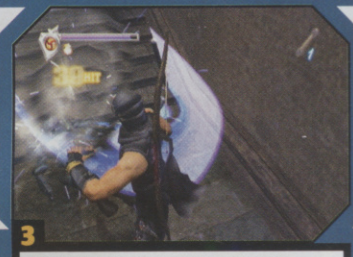
With its vicious AI, huge range of moves, and levels that require some lateral thinking to fully exploit, you'll need your wits about you to survive Ninja Gaiden .

In fact it puts us in mind of a very hardcore take on the classic Legend of Zelda series, with very specific ways to get the better of foes and access their hidden treasures.

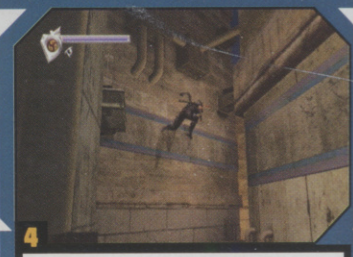


1 ■ Fire arrows at distant foes to keep them out of your face as you progress through the level

2 ■ Hop off the shoulders of one guy to stagger him, then launch yourself into the air for another attack



3 ■ Switch between weapons to deal the most appropriate damage. Nunchakus are great up close



4 ■ Use the walls to bound higher and reach secret areas for more power-ups and helpful items

NINJA BISCUITS HERE

There are so many secrets hidden around the huge worlds of Ninja Gaiden. The first time you fly through a level you'll miss most of them!

The more confident you become, the more you realise how versatile Ryu can be, and you'll notice shortcuts and secret hidey-holes. Early in the game you're taught how to look for clues, but you should train your eyes for when you're left to manage alone.

■ Follow the blue markings, that's the general rule. Clambering around teaches you cool new tricks

■ If you touch the Xbox icon it instantly restores Ryu to full health. Plus you'll need this super shuriken

■ Okay, so this chest was easy to find, but there are others that are hard to reach containing cool stuff

THE BOSS-MOST EVER

Just when you think you're flying, everything under control, you're presented with a boss challenge to hurt your pride.
Boss battles in Ninja Gaiden are a real wake-up call for the casual player. There's no easy way to beat 'em – the only way you'll defeat them is to learn their patterns and find the exact way to counter their every move. Good luck!

1
■ *First immovable object is a nunchaku master who, it turns out, only wants to help you become stronger*

2
■ *Despite being only the second boss in the game, this mounted Samurai is such a cheating sleazebag!*

3
■ *Word of advice: you must upgrade your sword before facing this guy, unless you've got a death wish*

Prior to every key encounter another brilliant cut-scene kicks in

Something is the matter with this ship here, probably ninjas again. Damn ninjas!

ORB BABY

Defeated enemies leave behind magical orbs; collect them for health or magic power-ups or to trade in as currency for items.

"YOUR NEWFOUND STRENGTH EXPOSES THE ENEMY'S WEAKNESS. IT'S AN OPPORTUNITY TO DOMINATE"

These bad guys don't stand a a chance now Ryu's mastered the timing for this dash 'n' slash attack

how to love. He's a pain in the arse to handle early on, and you blame him for repeatedly handing the advantage to the enemy. He isn't ready made with the greatest moves on a plate – instead, you're forced to master the basics of movement and attack against foes who have the advantage in both respects.

Strangely for an action-adventure, this is vaguely similar to learning the ropes in a 3D beat 'em up. It's almost like the progression Final Fight made after Capcom's original Street Fighter – a one-on-one that became a one-versus-many in which nobody plays fair. Except in this case Ryu is developed from what we know from Dead or Alive.

Seriously, every bad guy you meet in Ninja Gaiden stands a good chance of claiming Ryu's life. Blow the dust of your hand-eye co-ordination, because you're going to need it from the very start.

POWER AND INSTINCT

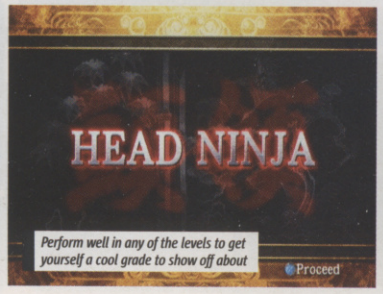
As the game progresses Ryu picks up new techniques, usually just as you need them most. Specific enemy types cause untold misery for most of a level, until just before or just after an encounter with a boss. Then Ryu will learn a crucial technique or weapon upgrade. After that it's like being granted a breath of fresh air as your newfound strength exposes the enemy's weakness. It's an opportunity to dominate, before facing the next challenge.

The turning point, where pain becomes pleasure, is when you realise environments are there to extend Ryu's combat potential. Your initial approach will be to square off with the enemy, trading blows, hoping your button-mashing will win out. Jump and attack is all you feel at home with.

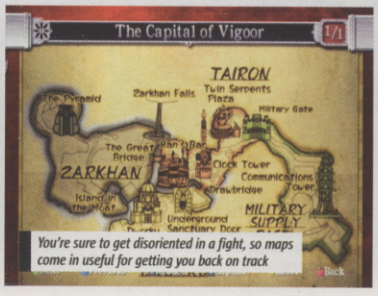
Out of necessity though you'll discover how kicking off walls then slamming the ground with Ryu's sword takes down multiple foes, or how Ryu jumping off the shoulders of a foe inflicts damage. Each new technique compliments the others, giving freedom to experiment and win battles your own way.

You've 40-plus hours to test your mettle in Ninja Gaiden, but not all of it is survived with brawn plus blades. You're also expected to steer Ryu through some formidable obstacle-laden environments, forcing you to tighten up those wall-running skills and hone your positional »

If you prefer, you can take aim for projectile weapons using first-person mode



Perform well in any of the levels to get yourself a cool grade to show off about



You're sure to get disoriented in a fight, so maps come in useful for getting you back on track

NINJA KNOW-HOW

Ryu learns techniques from ancient scrolls. His Izuna Drop and Neck Throw are joined by charge moves with the sword, and swift multiple strikes that make light work of many foes.
You'll find it strange that blocking attacks in order to counter them becomes an essential part of the routine, but the tension within skirmishes is improved because of this.

1
■ *Counter strikes launch enemies into the air, smashing them against the nearest wall*

2
■ *Amazing ninpo magic frazzles anything within range to a crisp. Take good aim though*

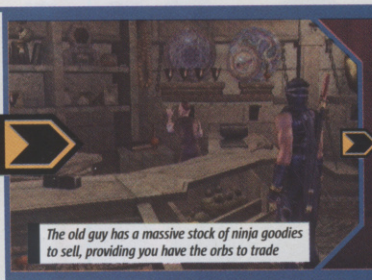
3
■ *If enemies are lined up, you can knock them into each other to clear a way through*

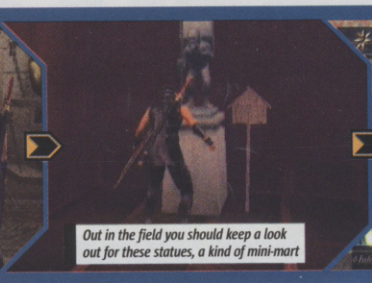
4
■ *Likewise, if enemies insist on holding hands, you can take them out with one almighty dashing attack*

■ A wealth of magical items enhance Ryu's strength and capacity for magic. You'll find chests with life-giving elixirs, or

SHURIKEN BOY'S SHOPPING SPREE

potions good for fuelling one ninpo attack. Golden orbs are also exchanged for weapon upgrades or more plentiful supplies of items.


The old guy has a massive stock of ninja goodies to sell, providing you have the orbs to trade


Out in the field you should keep a look out for these statues, a kind of mini-mart

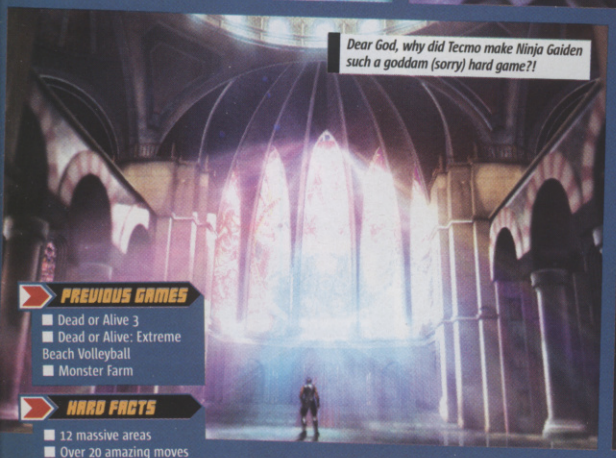
Don't forget to level-up your weapons, it isn't just a nice thing it's a necessary thing!

Oh, the relief! When you're stocked up on items you're ready to rock, dude

"THE DEAL IS THAT YOU FIGHT WITH ALL YOU'VE GOT TO OVERCOME RUSTY REFLEXES"

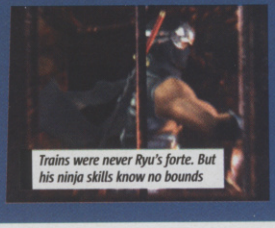
The most beautiful stained glass window in a game, ever...

It's not often you get a game that requires such concentration


Dear God, why did Tecmo make Ninja Gaiden such a goddam (sorry) hard game?!

That's a nice train you've got there, shame if someone were to nick it...

I can't see anything, Captain. All I can see is this red mist. Driving me nuts!


Trains were never Ryu's forte. But his ninja skills know no bounds

Okay, can we stop the game right here. This is where we'd like to be, cheers

PREVIOUS GAMES

- Dead or Alive 3
- Dead or Alive: Extreme Beach Volleyball
- Monster Farm

HARD FACTS

- 12 massive areas
- Over 20 amazing moves
- Grades your performance and gives you a special pass code

DID YOU KNOW?

- Ryu Hayabusa also features in all the Dead or Alive fighting games from Tecmo, after making his arcade debut in 1988

sense to a competitive level. You'll be relying on this to get you through the game, first and foremost, but also to prove you're the ninja master when Microsoft opens up its online tournaments in the Summer on Xbox Live.

There's no doubt about who the bad guys are in Ninja Gaiden: this is not your friend

VILLAGE FATE

Obstacle navigation can annoy you early on too. But it's not too long before you really enjoy running up surfaces to somersault or grab onto ledges, or switching between walls to gain height. An hour will find you slowly, awkwardly finding your way. A few hours more and you'll be hurtling around, capitalising on your speed of thought and dexterity of fingers. It's a total joy.

As we mentioned earlier, the better your ninja agility, the more effectiveness you are as a warrior. The pressure is constant to find the most efficient routes and swiftest methods to dispatch opponents. It can feel horribly oppressive, but the deal is that only by fighting with everything you've got will you overcome your uncertainties and rusty reflexes to become Ryu Hayabusa, and get a real sense of victory. You'll swear this or that boss is impossible, and dread certain areas between Ryu and the next save point, but it's all worth it in the end, we promise.

We'll mention one criticism that many people seem to have of Ninja Gaiden, which is that the learning curve is kind of wobbly. Although the game tries hard to add layers of intensity and the means to deal with it as the hours peel away, sometimes you encounter pockets of absolute nightmarish difficulty among comparatively less challenging areas. The city of Vigoor, in which Ninjas with exploding shuriken occasionally ambush Ryu is an example of this.

However, this is a minor issue in our opinion and we think you'll relish the depth and scale of this truly epic quest as much as us. ✷

It takes a lot to drag me away from Splinter Cell at the moment, but I've got to say Ninja Gaiden has my undivided attention. Although I've never been so frustrated as I have while fighting the bosses (cheating SOBs), the overall gameplay is top notch, and a real showcase for Xbox. You shouldn't need to think twice about buying this!

GRAPHICS — 95
Most enemies are complex in detail. Most areas are lush, only a few are bland

SOUND — 79
Forgettable music, but the spot effects are all suitably shing-shing-schwing... huargh!

GAMEPLAY — 94
Beats the hell out of you for the first hour or so, but you'll learn to love the controls

LASTING APPEAL — 89
Seriously enormous – it will take you ages to battle through. You WILL play it again

A welcome return to the no nonsense do-or-die school of games. You have to battle for every inch, but around every corner there's something amazing!

OVERALL SCORE 93

HOW IT COMPARES
ONIMUSHA 3
NINJA GAIDEN
SEVEN SAMURAI 20XX

YOU'RE DEAD, NINJA BOY!

Not one single enemy in the entire game is a total pushover. Even the lowliest of foes can surprise you with a nasty move you haven't seen before.

You will have played lots of games in which the bad guys, apart from the main characters, are pretty much just fodder for you to experiment with. In Ninja Gaiden it feels like you're the one being toyed with, and your nerve is tested to the max at all times.

■ Guys on horseback split up and canter around this arena in both directions, just to piss you off

■ These ninjas carry exploding shuriken which stick to you and cause huge damage! Gaaargh!

■ Usually the thickest guys around in videogames, these foot soldiers sneak up and slit yer throat! Gak!

RELEASE DATE
8 MAY

GAME INFO
COST: £39.99
PLAYERS: 1

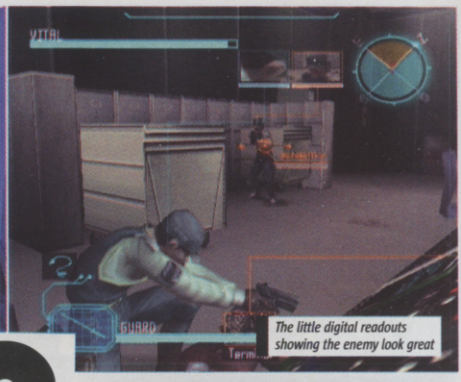
CONTACT INFO
- PUB: KONAMI
- DEV: KCET
- WWW.KONAMIJPN.COM/PRODUCTS/CYGIRLS
- CONTACT: 01895 470506

PS2

Ice is the gun-slinging explosives expert

Aska is the ninja one of the pair. She can't use guns

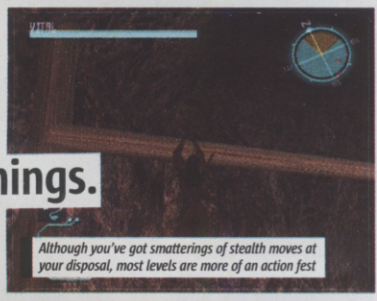
When asses are being kicked, things can start to look pretty classy



The little digital readouts showing the enemy look great

CY GIRLS

Girls and kung fu – two of our favourite things. Must be good, right?


Although you've got smatterings of stealth moves at your disposal, most levels are more of an action fest

You can creep around the place, but generally there's no need

What do you get if you cross Charlie's Angels with The Matrix? No, not Keanu Reeves and Laurence Fishburne in bra and panties doing backflips – you get Cy Girls.

Due to overcrowding, the government is constructing Matrix-style 'cyber districts' where people can plug into a terminal and spend their lives online. Policing against terrorists in this world are Ice and Aska, deadly and beautiful female agents. The game comes on two DVDs, with each character enjoying her own (though linked) story.

GIRL POWER

Essentially, Cy Girls is a third-person adventure that throws in elements of every other game in the genre you care to mention. While it may look like a stealth 'em up, really it's an out-and-out actioner, with gameplay split between exploration, combat and puzzle solving.

Aska is a ninja – nimble as a genetically enhanced ferret, as happy running on the walls as cartwheeling down corridors. Ice is a guns and explosives specialist, great at shooting round corners, in midair and from the floor. These two gals' moves are cool and look the business, but don't take any skill to pull off.

GIRL POWER

Visual touches like the digital displays the girls get when they spot enemies, and the classy looks of the virtual world are occasionally great. And at times, ploughing through the levels kicking muchos butt is fun. But there are problems.

The camera system is not great, and both the angle control methods you can choose feel like compromises. Combat, while full of flashy slo-mo Bullet Time effects and special moves, is pretty bland, with a short bout of button-bashing sufficing for all but the hardest of bosses.

This is forgivable for as long as you are making progress through the levels, but when you start getting stumped by the game's frequent find-and-fetch 'puzzles' you soon run out of patience. You could do worse than Cy Girls – especially as it offers such replay value with the two discs. But you could do plenty better too, as there are loads of way superior third-person action adventures out there these days. ✷

PREVIOUS GAMES
- 7 Blades, Metal Gear Solid, MGS2 Substance, Zone Of The Enders

HARD FACTS
- In one level playing as Aska, you have to find and retrieve no less than 16 cleaning robot data cards. And let us tell you, this tedious and time-consuming task is really no fun at all

DID YOU KNOW?
- Cy Girls is based on a Japanese toy and cartoon franchise called Cool Girls. We've never heard of it, but apparently it's popular over there

ENTER THIS MATRIX

One of the benefits of having half a supercomputer implanted in your brain is that you can directly link into the Internet. You don't need Blueyonder or Telewest or anything.

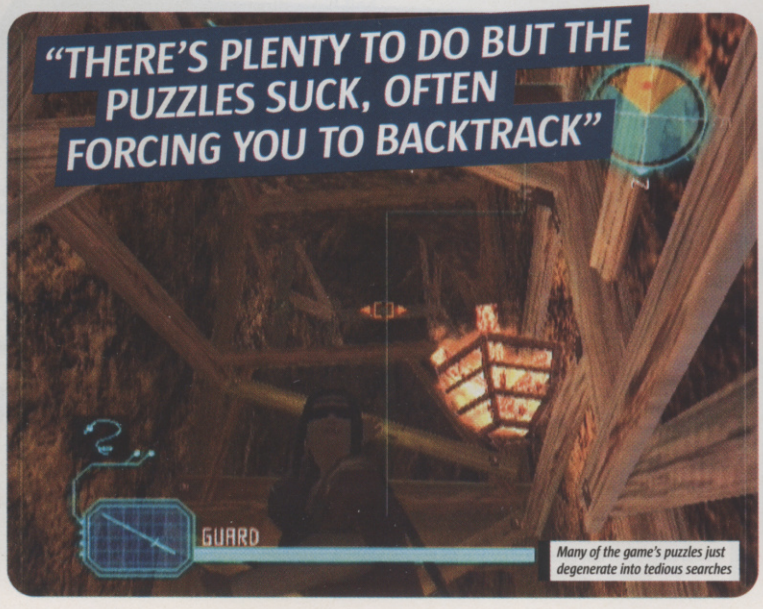
This is one of Cy Girl's coolest aspects, as the gameplay switches into a Matrix-like environment where all the items you are carrying in the real world become useless.

1 ■ Find a terminal like this one, jack yourself in, and you can dive straight into cyberspace

2 ■ You're in! Now you have to master new skills which you can then download into your memory

3 ■ New sets of button combos are used to unleash your cyber powers, giving you some cool fresh moves

4 ■ But even online there's a place for good old kung fu. Some things come in handy wherever you are...



Many of the game's puzzles just degenerate into tedious searches

CVG VERDICT

GRAPHICS — P2
There are some nice effects – especially in cyberspace, but the locations are dreary

SOUND — P0
The voiceovers are decent enough and generic music does the trick

GAMEPLAY — 63
There's plenty to do but the puzzles suck, often forcing you to backtrack

LASTING APPEAL — PT
Each character's adventure gets a separate disc which helps, but not much

This pair of butt-bashing bints may be big in Japan, but we don't see the game taking off here. Some nice touches, but we've seen it all already.

OVERALL SCORE 66

HOW IT COMPARES
- METAL GEAR SOLID 2
- CY GIRLS
- SPLINTER CELL: PT

RELEASE DATE
OUT NOW

GAME INFO
COST: £39.99
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONTACT INFO
- PUB: CODEMASTERS
- DEV: CODEMASTERS
- WWW.CODEMASTERS.CO.UK/TOCARACEDRIVER
- CONTACT: 01926 816044

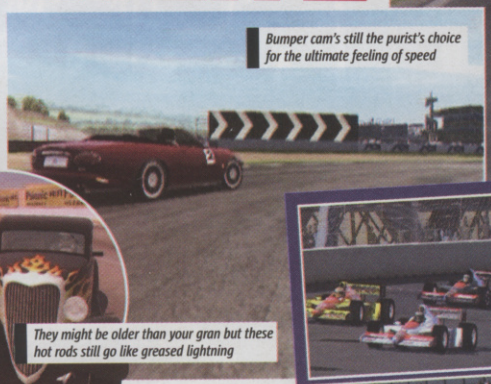
ONLINE GAMING
- 1-12 PLAYERS
- XBOX LIVE/HEADSET

TOCA RACE DRIVER 2

Fifteen different motorsports and they all burn rubber like a fire in a condom factory

The first lap sees 21 cars bunched together – it's mad out there!

Exhaust flashes are another little graphical touch that make TOCA 2 look so money



Bumper cam's still the purist's choice for the ultimate feeling of speed

They might be older than your gran but these hot rods still go like greased lightning

What have recent racing games taught us about being a motorsports driver? **The last TOCA suggested that having spiky hair and a dead dad was a passport to racing stardom. Then R: Racing told us we needed to be female, have a cracking set of paps, and shower a lot.**

That's the problem with driving games with storylines: they jam you into the crash helmet of someone you either hate or can't relate to because they're daft wee girls who look good in overalls.

TOCA's first success is getting its storyline right. It's about YOU starting at the bottom and driving your way to the top, and YOU are the star. Every cutscene is first-person with characters talking directly at you. The only problem is you can't talk back.

But don't worry. Out on the track you can let your skills do the talking. TOCA 2 has 15 different motorsports under its shiny bonnet, and we're not talking half-arsed efforts like R: Racing's rally driving. Christ, the first thing you drive is a Ford GT, and that's followed by an Aston Martin DB7. These cars, if you didn't know, go like stink off shite.

TRUCKING HELL

But don't get too comfy. Soon you'll be squeezing your nads into the matchbox cockpit of a fast but flimsy Formula Ford. Then you'll be jarring your spinal column around dirt tracks in an Impreza. Then you'll be hurling redneck pick-up trucks round an oval. Then you'll be stuffing a truck through a chicane. Read it again. Trucks!

And it's not just the variety that impresses – each discipline feels totally different. Formula Fords are nippy but spin out at the slightest dab on the accelerator, rally cars slide attractively like mud-wrestling Sugababes, and touring cars go like the clappers but stick to the road like dead cat. TOCA 2 even manages to make racing round an oval seem interesting – a feat deserving of a pint in itself.

The only disappointment is truck racing. We were so excited we all bought Yorkies and those mesh caps from TopShop. But it's a bit pants. Trucks are big, sluggish, and handle like Michelle McManus in a wonky shopping trolley. You can't even do the horn. Boo.

That's why we hate TOCA 2. Only joking! It gets better. This isn't just about driving. It's about sticking your nuts on the line and fighting like a

There's plenty to keep boy racers happy too, like Skylines, Imprezas, Evos, and Mitsu GTs

HANDLING BUSINESS

For a game that offers 35 cars and 15 separate motorsports, TOCA 2 handles like God did the physics engine.

It's not Gran Turismo, it's not Gotham, it's not Burnout – it's some amazing thing that takes the best bits of everything and attaches them together in a brilliant Frankenstein's monster of turbo-charged racing brilliance. It's alive!

1 ■ They look wimpy but Formula Fords have so much acceleration it's hard to keep them from going sideways

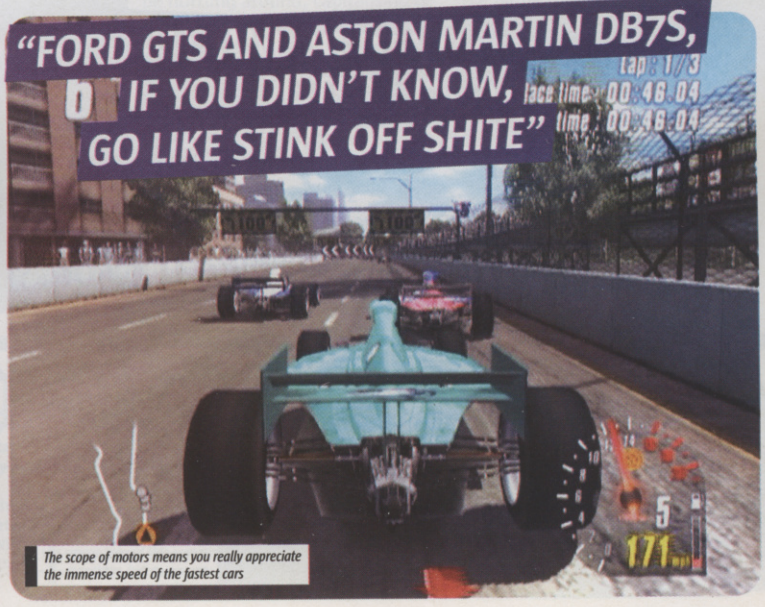
2 ■ AI drivers will protect their lines, cut you up and nudge you, leaving you wrestling for control

3 ■ Don't even think about shortcuts over grass or gravel – it'll send your arse spinning out

4 ■ And once you get hold of the motor masterpieces you'll revel in their awesome road-holding

There's a cockpit view you can use if you're a real stickler for realism. Or someone's dad

The damage model is progressive and eventually terminal. Not having a tyre is a good way to get there

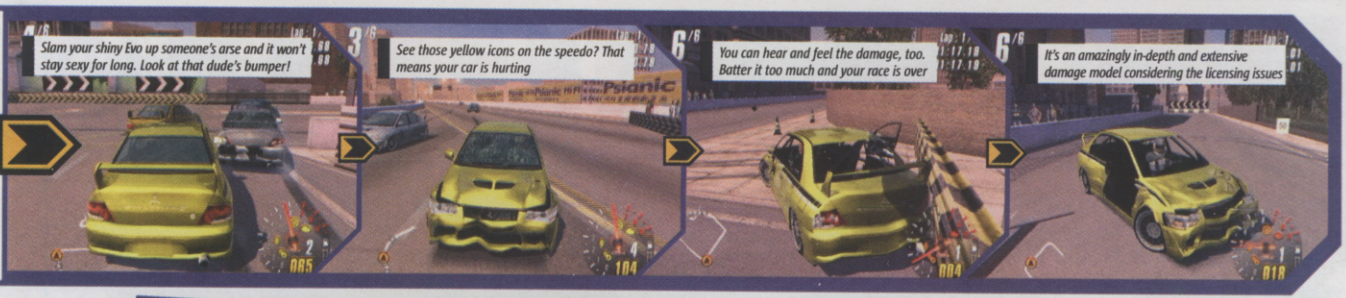


The scope of motors means you really appreciate the immense speed of the fastest cars

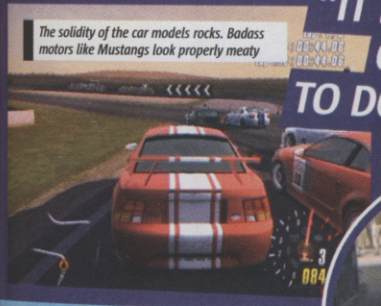
■ You've noticed, eh? TOCA 2 looks wicked. The backgrounds are crisper than burnt bacon and the cars look hot as vindaloo.

WRITE IT OFF

Until you drive them into a wall. Then they fall to bits. It's not just cosmetic, either – it actually affects your handling and performance.



"IT DOES IN ONE PACKAGE WHAT COUNTLESS OTHER DRIVING GAMES TRY TO DO. AND DOES IT BETTER"


The solidity of the car models rocks. Badass motors like Mustangs look properly meaty

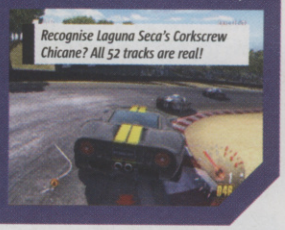
WHAT'S THE STORY?

Your boss is skint so this bird gets you some money if you do a documentary. Not exactly based on a true story, but better than R: Racing.

Oval racing? Fun? In TOCA 2 it is! It's not just about turning left – it's about control, balance, and poise

Full-on mash-ups result in fibreglass splinters flying everywhere and bumpers dropping off

The truck racing is a bit lame, but dammit – do they look cool or what?


Recognise Laguna Seca's Corkscrew Chicane? All 52 tracks are real!

Land Rover Bowlers in a racing game: unusual. Crap weather at Loch Rannoch in Scotland: not unusual

Even the rally sections are loads of fun. Colin McRae shouldn't worry, but it kicks R: Racing's ass

PREVIOUS GAMES

■ TOCA Race Driver, Colin McRae 04, LMA Manager 2004, Club Football

HARD FACTS

■ Number of motors: 35
■ Number of circuits: 52
■ Number of motorsport disciplines: 15
■ Maximum number of cars in a race: 21
■ Top speed of the first car you drive: 211mph

DID YOU KNOW?

■ F1 cars generate so much downforce (over 2000kg, or one Vanessa Feltz, sitting on top of the car!) they could drive upside down if they kept their speed high enough!

wounded meerkat (meerkats are MEAN) to get to the front. Every one of the 32 championships comes with a position target tighter than a Scotsman's wallet.

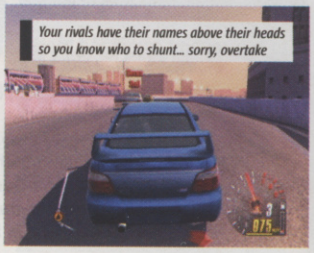
BUMPER CARS

It makes every race intense storms of squealing rubber, especially when you've got 21 cars to smoke. It's scary stuff knowing that you have to push it hard but any mistake will send 19 cars catapulting past you.

But that's if you get past them in the first place. The computer driver AI rules. They stick to the racing line and do their damnedest to get past you or stop you from passing. Combine this with racing rivalries and you're looking at some awesome bumper-to-bumper brawls. We were taking the final bend just ahead of our biggest rival when the gimp pushed too hard, hammered our rear wing and took us both out. Genius.

Stellan's a hotshot Swedish driver. He's nice, but your other rival, Cesar, out-twats Michael Schumacher

You will find yourself having to repeat races over and over, but the storyline and the promise of a totally different racing style keep you going. If you do get a bit bored you can muck around with the arcade mode or go online with 11 other racers. Believe it: for thoroughbred track racing thrills TOCA 2 knocks Gotham 2 into a scuffed crash helmet.


Your rivals have their names above their heads so you know who to shunt... sorry, overtake

This game is phenomenal. It does in one package what countless other racing games try to do. And does it better.

So what has TOCA 2 taught us about being a motorsports driver? It's taught us that spiky hair and tits don't matter. Getting behind the wheel and thrashing it hard matters, and TOCA 2 does that better than anything on Xbox. ✷

CVG 2ND OPINION

I'm a dedicated Gotham grease monkey so TOCA's floatier handling turned me off a bit. The pad doesn't shake much, either – if I'm rattling across dirt tracks and rumble strips I want my tendons to explode with force feedback! The cool variety of motors and the polished visuals kept me motoring, but I'm gonna keep sticking my key in Gotham's ignition.

CVG VERDICT

GRAPHICS — 92
Crisp backdrops, spot-on tracks, and massive, sexy motors. Absolute petrol-scented class

SOUND — 91
Wee motors are buzzy but not annoying and beasts are throatier than a Slipknot album

GAMEPLAY — 88
Action-packed racing fuel injected with sweaty adrenaline and lots of variety too

LASTING APPEAL — 90
A tough-as-old-Volkswagen story mode and intense online races mean plenty of mpg

GOTHAM OVER-TOCA-N?

TOCA 2's brilliant on PC too, but there's much less racing game competition on Xbox. So is it better than Gotham? We're going to say... sort of.

TOCA's online mode is nowhere near as extensive as Gotham's, and Gotham has loads more cars. But, TOCA does a better job of capturing the thrill of track racing and is a much more enjoyable single-player experience.

■ Exhibit A: Trucks. It's got loads of cars, but does Gotham let you drive trucks in a white trash mesh cap?

■ Exhibit B: Gotham's got powerslides but can you do them on icy rally tracks?

■ Exhibit C: Formula 1 racing. You can keep your Enzos, these babies scream like banshees!

The first must-have racer in a year. It never lets petrol-headery get in the way of fast, relentless racing and the variety of motors is astonishing.

OVERALL SCORE 91

HOW IT COMPARES
PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2
TOCA RACE DRIVER 2
R: RACING

RELEASE DATE
26 JUNE

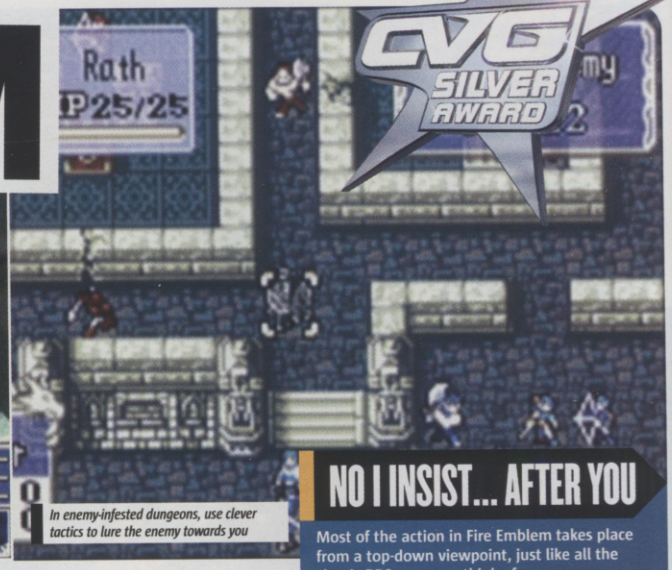
GAME INFO
COST: £29.99
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONTACT INFO
* PUB: NINTENDO
* DEV: INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS
* HTTP://FIREEMBLEM.GAMEBOY.COM
* CONTACT: 0870 6060247

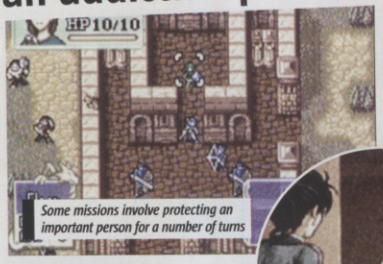
EXTRAS
* GAME BOY ADVANCE GAME LINK CABLE

FIRE EMBLEM

Advance Wars-style RPG tactical battling with an addictive personality



CVG SILVER AWARD



Some missions involve protecting an important person for a number of turns

The neat animation touches in the 2D battles are even better than the battles in Advance Wars

Hard to believe this artwork is on your GBA

In enemy-infested dungeons, use clever tactics to lure the enemy towards you

Advance Wars 1 and 2 may be the ironclad, big-balled daddies of the handheld battle strategy pack, but Fire Emblem was there many years before, and even before that it was an anime series in Japan.

The most unusual thing about Fire Emblem (apart from Florina, the weird girl with the big bow and arrows who's scared of men) is the fact that the heroes in the game actually talk to you! Makes you feel all warm and fuzzy inside.

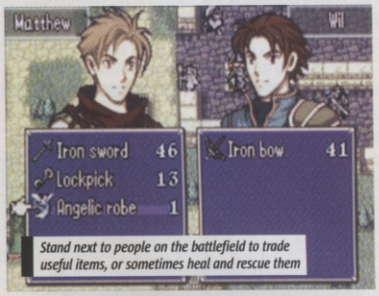
When the epic tale begins, your character (who you never actually see) is found unconscious on the plains of Sacae in eastern Elibe. A young orphan girl called Lyn rescues you and asks you to be her tactician as she bids to improve her swordfighting skills. It soon transpires that there's much more to Lyn's quest than meets the eye when she discovers that she's the heir to the throne of Lycia, and consequently finds herself mired in an ugly and bloody inheritance dispute.

When you accompany Lyn across the vast realm you get plenty of opportunity to flex your tactical muscles as you encounter brigands, bandits and other assorted bastardos, all of whom want to stop Lyn from reaching her grandfather.

FIRE IN THE HOLE

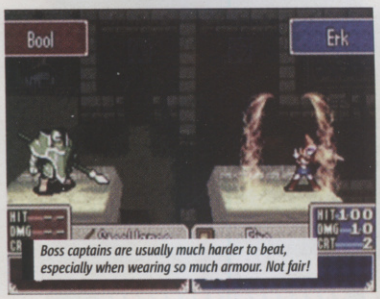
As apprentice tactician, your job is to control and command the various units that are in Lyn's party at any given time. Many people come and go in the party, which sometimes seems like one big dating agency! Everyone is trying to cop off with everyone else, and young knights such as Sain and Kent are forever waving their swords about suggestively. It's all a bit saucy, and keeping tabs on who fancies who makes for a diverting little side-quest when you get bored of playing with your tactics!

In terms of the serious business of battle strategy, Fire Emblem eases you in gently rather than thrusting you hot and heavy into the heaving fray. The characters give you hints on what to do next, and will start ranting at you if you don't do as they say. Very cute. Initially, you only



Stand next to people on the battlefield to trade useful items, or sometimes heal and rescue them

Defeat as many enemies as possible in battle to build up your experience points and reach the next level



Boss captains are usually much harder to beat, especially when wearing so much armour. Not fair!

Enter your name when you start and the characters will address you directly during the game

In the early stages members of your team give you spoken hints on how best to use them

"THE MOST UNUSUAL THING ABOUT FIRE EMBLEM IS THAT THE HEROES ACTUALLY TALK TO YOU!"

NO I INSIST... AFTER YOU

Most of the action in Fire Emblem takes place from a top-down viewpoint, just like all the classic RPGs you can think of.

Movement is entirely turn-based. Most of the time each character will only be able to perform one action, but in certain circumstances, if serenaded by a Bard, for example, they will get a second chance to act.

1 ■ The blue squares indicate where you are able to move on your turn. Using an item counts as one turn

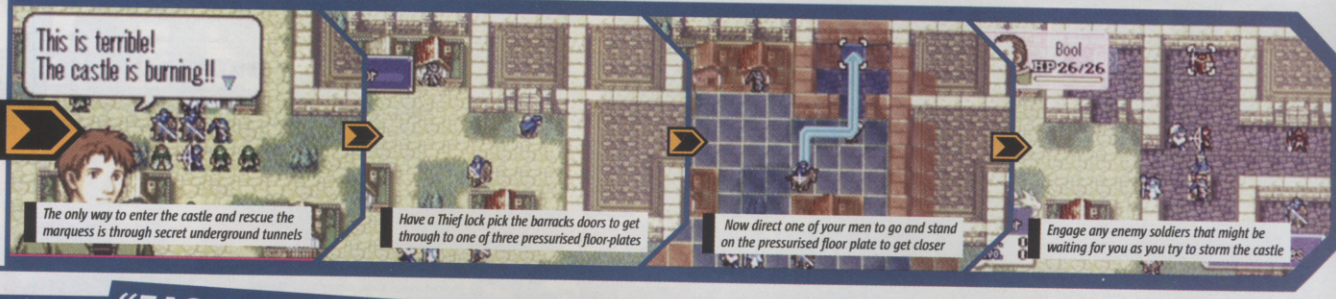
2 ■ Bards can play tunes for their colleagues and grant them an extra turn, but they're vulnerable to attack

3 ■ Once you have chosen to attack an enemy, the scene changes to a real-time 2D one-on-one battle

4 ■ Press Select to call up a tactical map screen in the middle of the battlefield to help plan your next move

■ To illustrate a typical mission we're going to walk you through the main events of Chapter 6: Blood of Pride. When you arrive, the captain of the castle guard, Rath, urges Lyn to leave as the castle has been set on fire and the marquess surrounded.

BLOOD OF PRIDE



The only way to enter the castle and rescue the marquess is through secret underground tunnels

Have a Thief lock pick the barracks doors to get through to one of three pressurised floor-plates

Now direct one of your men to go and stand on the pressurised floor plate to get closer

Engage any enemy soldiers that might be waiting for you as you try to storm the castle

"EASES YOU IN GENTLY RATHER THAN THRUSTING YOU HOT AND HEAVY INTO THE HEAVING FRAY"

The level-up screen shows which attributes have been raised after a battle

Use mountains and woodland as cover to gain the advantage

The Black Fang emerge as Lyn's main opponents during the game. They want to bring dragons back to Elibe

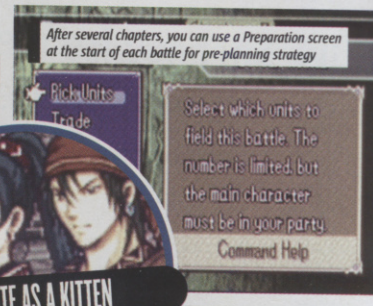
That's an interesting question. Maybe we should do something about your green hair

Should Lyn ever get defeated it'll be instant Game Over, and lots of tears

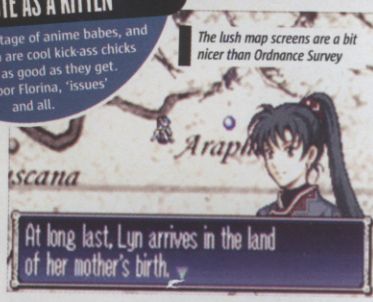
Get a room, you shameless flirts! This sort of thing goes on all the time!

CUTE AS A KITTEN

There's no shortage of anime babes, and most of them are cool kick-ass chicks who give as good as they get. Even poor Florina, 'issues' and all.



After several chapters, you can use a Preparation screen at the start of each battle for pre-planning strategy



The lush map screens are a bit nicer than Ordnance Survey

PREVIOUS GAMES

■ Advance Wars ✷ Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising ✷ Paper Mario ✷ Super Metroid ✷ Mario Kart Super Circuit

HARD FACTS

■ 31 thrilling chapters to complete
■ 18 unit types to command
■ Elibe is divided into six diverse regions, but has hundreds of battle scenarios

DID YOU KNOW?

■ The Fire Emblem series of games has been knocking around for years in Japan. The original Fire Emblem was released on the Famicom (NES), way back in 1990

have a very few units to direct, but the deeper you go, the more strategic thinking comes into play.

PORK SWORD

Fire Emblem may look like a traditional RPG, with all the usual magic-casting mages and sword-thrusting heroes and heroines, but it's actually much closer in feel to Advance Wars than Sword Of Mana. You get to direct the action in hundreds of tiny battle scenarios, all linked by gorgeous animé cutscenes that fizz with witty dialogue.

Sure, there are huge chunks of mystical plot explanations, but that's all part of the fun. The more the game opens up, the more intrigued you become. Every time a new character or type of unit appears you get engrossed all over again, finding out their strengths and weaknesses and learning how best to deploy them.

The sheer scale of the game will ensure that you're playing it for months to come, and the inclusion of the Link Arena multiplayer mode will prolong enjoyment even further. Fans of traditional GBA RPG classics such as Golden Sun who might not have fancied Advance Wars will be drawn to its familiar themes of prejudice and bigotry, some of which run very deep. Action junkies can simply scroll through all the chatter and pretty pictures and get to the good stuff, namely, guiding your units around the battlefield with the aim of defeating each new threat.

Lyn unleashes her secret weapon: a fart bomb following last night's curry

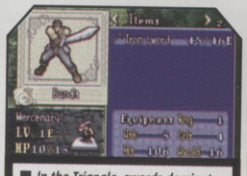
Chat to villagers to pick up tips – even the grumpy ones who don't offer you a cup of tea

It's true that once you learn how to command your units, there's not much variation in the actual mechanics of the gameplay, but there's still an impressive amount of variation in terms of the type of mission you undertake. And there are dragons in it. What more do you need? ✷

FANCY A THREE-WAY?

One of the first things you'll learn as a wet-behind-the-ears apprentice tactician is the power of three.

The effectiveness of a weapon is governed by its position in the Weapon Triangle, and the potency of a magic spell depends on where it figures in the Trinity of Magic. The strength of a physical or magical attack can be drastically affected by the triangle. It's a bit like paper/scissors/stones, but more arcane.



■ In the Triangle, swords dominate axes, lances beat swords and axes beat lances. Ignore this at your peril!

■ The Trinity of Magic: anima rules light magic, light magic dominates dark, and dark magic beats anima

■ The character screen shows what sort of magic is available to characters, and it looks neat too!

CVG 2ND OPINION

PAUL

There probably wouldn't have been Final Fantasy Tactics, Advance Wars, or any of Sega's Shining series if it weren't for Fire Emblem. You're mainly battling, but there is plenty of witty dialogue, as well as plot twists involving the terrific characters. Personally, I enjoy this far more than Advance Wars because you have people to command instead of units.

CVG VERDICT

MAURA

GRAPHICS — 82
Highly detailed environments, lush animé cutscenes and cute character animations

SOUND — 87
Cinematic-sounding score adds to the epic feel of the adventure

GAMEPLAY — 85
Equally as addictive as Advance Wars 1 and 2, which is really saying something

LASTING APPEAL — 83
Huge game + multiplayer mode = mucho bang for your buck

OVERALL SCORE 85

RPG fans and battle strategy fiends alike will love the combination of Advance Wars-style tactical combat and old-skool sword-slashing mayhem.

HOW IT COMPARES
ADV WARS 2: BLACK HOLE RISING
FIRE EMBLEM
FINAL FANTASY TACTICS

RELEASE DATE: MAY

GAME INFO: COST: £39.99 PLAYERS: 1

CONTACT INFO:
- PUB: KOEI
- DEV: INIPPON ICHI
- WWW.ATLAS.COM/DIS
- CONTACT: 01462 476130

DISGAEA

THE HOUR OF DARKNESS

Like anchovy ice cream with raspberry sauce, it's an acquired taste

The tasty explosions and effects are a sweet reward for successfully commanding your troops

The cut-scenes show moments of twisted humour, but the acting is incredibly strange

The 3D arenas often obscure the view. Where are the transparency effects PS2 can do so well?

"YOU FEEL AN ALMOST RELIGIOUS AWE EMBRACE YOU AS YOU REALISE HOW BLOODY CLEVER THE GAME IS"

NEO GEO-GRAPHY

There's plenty of original stuff to set Disgaea apart from its console strategy brothers.

The most useful new feature is the ability to throw allies around the arena to cover lots of ground in one turn, but there's a lot more to experiment with besides. Be sure to study each square and character carefully for hidden enhancements or abilities.

1 ■ Make sure you check out each Geo Symbol's specific characteristics before you destroy or move it

2 ■ Destroy multiple Geo Symbols to create massive chains of damage to the corresponding squares on the grid

3 ■ Aligning your warriors alongside each other in different formations can unleash major special attacks

4 ■ Etna carries the explosive Prinny character on her shoulders ready to lob at an unsuspecting foe

Choose from a bafflingly complex array of characters when making new pupils, including defeated monster types

Some people use extreme sports to push themselves to the limit, hurling themselves out of planes and into shark infested waters with rotting porpoise meat strapped to their arses.

Playing Disgaea might not be as physically demanding as base-jumping off the Space Needle, but it'll certainly give your grey matter a thorough drubbing. In fact, it's one of the most hardcore strategy games you're ever likely to play.

It's guaranteed to put your brain to the toughest test, with the risk of your noodle overloading and starting to dribble out of your ears.

DILATED PUPILS

You control demon lord Laharl and your own personal army of pupils in a battle to regain control of your beleaguered Netherworld. Battles are fought on 3D grids, with varying terrain, massive gaps to cross and all sorts of crazy anomalies that affect your legion in all manner of mental ways.

You can create an almost limitless number of pupils, but only ten can be called out at once. Creating a balanced squad is a massively complicated process of checking individuals' character strengths, as well their assigned jobs and even their proficiency with the multitude of weapons and items available.

And that's just for starters. Individual weapons and items can be upgraded by entering the Item World and proving your worth by battling bizarre monsters. The longer you survive, the higher your item's level advancement.

LABOUR OF LOVE

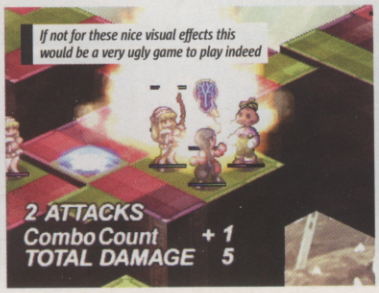
The missions themselves are long and tough, and you'll need to get to grips with managing your items and pupils early on if you're to get anywhere at all. As tough as it is, Disgaea is also stupidly addictive. Sure, sometimes you have no clue what's going on as it's just too damned impenetrable, but over time you slowly come to understand the subtle nuances of battle and character creation.

In fact it's so satisfying when this happens that you feel an almost religious awe embrace you as you realise how bloody clever the game is. It's safe to say that this is a pretty niche title, but if you're able to see past the PSone-quality background visuals, you'll find months and months of incredibly deep and rewarding strategising here. ✷

PREVIOUS GAMES
- Cooking Fighter, Phantom Brave, La Pucelle: Tactics

HARD FACTS
- 322 different types of weapon!
- 115 different armour components
- 226 different character types!
- Eight different endings

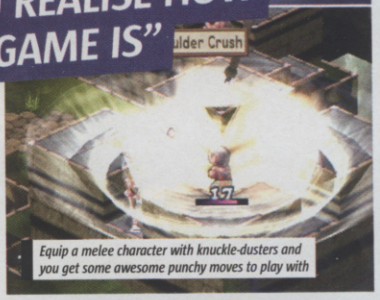
DID YOU KNOW?
- There is a fiercely loyal fan base for Disgaea, with forums, discussion groups and even the chance to ask the developer questions. Check out the game's official URL and go to www.doublejumpbooks.com/disgaea to join in.



If not for these nice visual effects this would be a very ugly game to play indeed

It's confusing for sure, but you do get help text on screen for every decision you have to make

Bringing all of your heroes out from the dimensional gate at once is risky, especially when bunched like this



Equip a melee character with knuckle-dusters and you get some awesome punchy moves to play with

CVG VERDICT

GRAPHICS 45
Awful backgrounds, simple sprites and only passable explosions

SOUND 58
Annoying and weird tunes with some truly bizarre speech

GAMEPLAY 94
Depth and satisfaction like you've never seen – unrivalled on consoles

LASTING APPEAL 92
Enormous and playable forever as it keeps on giving

The best of its type on any console. Not for everyone, of course, but it's easily the best strategy title in a very long time. Shame about the crap visuals, though.

OVERALL SCORE 88

HOW IT COMPARES
- FF TACTICS ADVANCE
- DISGAEA
- ROMANCE OF THE 3 KINGDOMS

RELEASE DATE
7 MAY

GAME INFO
COST: £39.99
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONTACT INFO
- PUB: MICROSOFT ✷ DEV: DIGITAL ILLUSIONS
- WWW.XBOX.COM/ENUS/RALLISPORTCHALLENGE2
- CONTACT: 0800 587 1102

ONLINE GAMING
- 1-4 PLAYERS
- XSN SUPPORT
- LEAGUES, CHALLENGES AND ONLINE STATISTICS

EXTRAS
- XBOX LIVE/HEADSET

RALLISPORT CHALLENGE 2

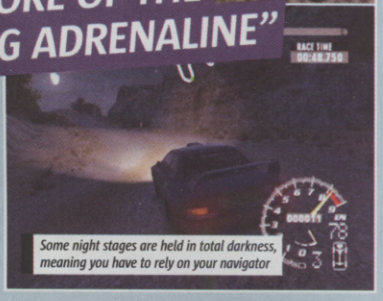
Death metal engines and pounding gearstick percussion: this is rock 'n' roll rallying

CVG GOLD AWARD

We're well impressed by the weather effects. Rain spatters the screen and makes road-holding dodgy

They're a staple of the genre, but Rallisport's particle effects are particularly dense and dusty

"LESS OF THE BOREDOM, LESS OF THE BULLCRAP AND MORE OF THE ARSE-CLENCHING ADRENALINE"



Some night stages are held in total darkness, meaning you have to rely on your navigator

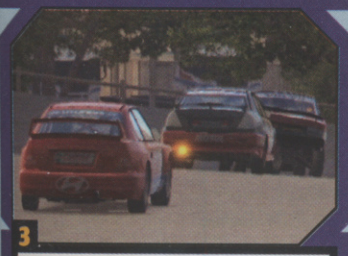
BUMPER TO BUMPER

Why race against the clock when you could be walloping the crap out of another car's bumper?

RalliSport's four-car races on ice tracks or closed-circuit rally stages are more refreshing than an ice shower in Death Valley. The tracks are narrow so bodywork-bending crashes happen all the time, especially when everyone's sliding around on the ice and mud.

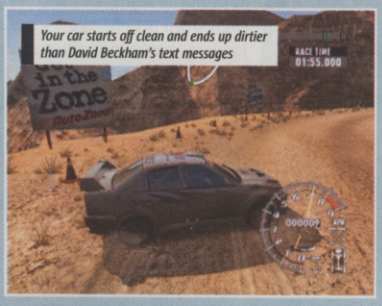
1 ■ Finally, the chance to thrash rally cars alongside your mates. RalliSport is cracking in multiplayer

2 ■ Don't get sandwiched on the start line – the track's so narrow you'll have to fight hard for your line



3 ■ Half the fun is shunting the rear end of your opponents to send them spinning into the barriers

4 ■ But there's no better feeling than arcing a powerslide on the inside of the leader and nicking the win!



Your car starts off clean and ends up dirtier than David Beckham's text messages

Limited Slip Differential. Understand that? What about Scandinavian Flick? No, it's not one of those videotapes you keep under your mattress...

Alright, can you understand the concept of hammering down a bumpy road at 120mph, your howling engine losing a sonic battle with the thrashy music grinding out of your speakers?

Good. Leave the boring stuff to the grandads who get their kicks from tweaking Colin McRae's exhaust pipes. RalliSport Challenge 2 can't be arsed with the technical aspects of the sport – it just wants you to get behind the wheel and feel the rush.

This is a much more in-your-face experience than most rally sims – your engine whines, your wheels bite into the dirt, and the pad rumbles with enough intensity to give you a serious case of Repetitive Strain Injury. At corners your car launches into sublime fishtail skids as if the joypad's plugged into the powerslide lobe of your brain. Nice.

RalliSport 2 nails its handling down better than any rally game we've played. Not that it's easy – you'll park your bonnet in a tree plenty of times as the stages get twistier and the weather gets wetter. Still, the damage model is so good you almost want to crash. Because of stupid legal reasons we can't show you cars getting destroyed, but trust us – it rocks.

As does everything about RalliSport's visuals. It looks awesome. The car models are beautifully meaty, but the real credit goes to the environments. We've never seen a game that so perfectly captures natural lighting.

RalliSport also offers more than just point-to-point rallying. Slippy ice racing, horsepower-sapping hill climbs and four car rallycross events keep things interesting. There's always something different to do and the 283 unlockables – which include monstrous Group B rally cars – keep you rewarded for your efforts.

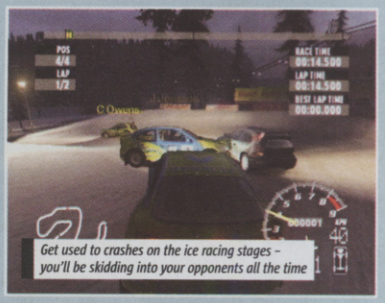
XSN support rounds off the package with the killer online experience we've come to expect from Microsoft's sports game service. Leagues, one-on-one challenges and statistical tracking add an extra layer of gasolene-soaked goodness.

This is how rally games should be – less of the boredom, less of the bullcrap and more of the arse-clenching adrenaline. Eat that, Colin McRae. ✷

PREVIOUS GAMES
■ Rallisport Challenge, Midtown Madness 3, NASCAR Heat, Rally Masters

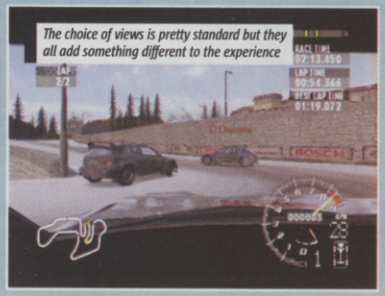
HARD FACTS
- Number of career modes: 4
- Number of cars: 32
- Number of tracks: 93
- Championships: 121
- Number of unlockables: 283

DID YOU KNOW?
■ Group B rally cars had horsepower of over 600bhp, equivalent to a Porsche Carrera GT. They were banned in 1986 after three spectators, two drivers and two navigators were killed in accidents.



Get used to crashes on the ice racing stages – you'll be skidding into your opponents all the time

Push too hard into a powerslide and you'll spin the puppy out. RalliSport's all about gentle control



The choice of views is pretty standard but they all add something different to the experience

CVG VERDICT

GRAEME

GRAPHICS 94
The best looking rally game ever? Yup. The best looking racing game ever? Oh yes.

SOUND 92
The engine roars are perfect and the thrashy soundtrack really energises the action

GAMEPLAY 89
Wicked handling, superb sensation of speed and so exciting that even rally-haters will dig it

LASTING APPEAL 88
Career mode and unlockables make single-player solid. Live support adds extra fun

RalliSport is exactly how rally games should be, emphasising the super-charged, powersliding thrills and cutting out the dull stuff completely.

OVERALL SCORE 90

HOW IT COMPARES
COLIN MCRAE 04
RALLISPORT CHALLENGE 2
V-RALLY 3

RELEASE DATE	GAME INFO	CONTACT INFO
JUNE	COST: £39.99 PLAYERS: 1	PUB: SCI DEV: CONFOUNDING FACTOR WWW.GALLEON-GAME.COM CONTACT: 020 7585 3308

GALLEON

Proof that the best things really do come to those who wait... and wait

The swirling icon means you are locked onto an object and the camera will revolve around it until the lock is broken

Watching Rhama forge the pin to get the lift to work is pretty cool

Rhama demonstrates his mad clubbing skills as Kylie's Red Blooded Woman pumps out of the stereo. The big girl

CVG GOLD AWARD

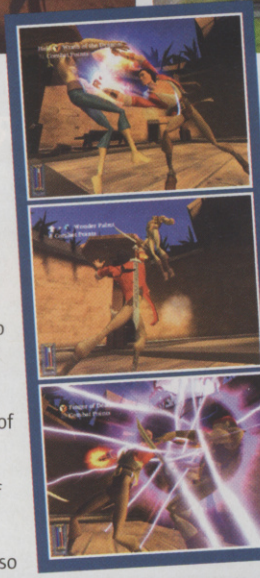
Swifter than a greyhound out a trap. More athletic than a gold medal-winning gymnast. And as lithe and stretchy as your favourite elastic-limbed porn star. Only uglier, and a bloke. That's Captain Rhama for you.

When you're speeding along wooden bridges jutting out of the sheer rock, leaping and swinging from precariously placed beams and struts, the wind rippling your hair and flapping your coat tails, the sense of exhilaration is unlike almost anything else you've felt in an action game. Quite some feat for an adventure that was originally destined for creaky old (and now defunct!) Dreamcast hardware.

P-P-P-PIRATE POWER!

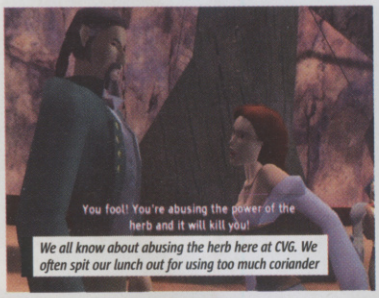
Now on Xbox, it's hard to imagine any other machine mighty enough to power the spectacularly smooth and fast game engine. You thought levels in Mario Sunshine and Prince Of Persia scaled mental heights? Galleon raises the bar into the stratosphere. Literally.

Then there's the character animation and the voice acting that are so incredibly believable you'll swear you're watching a Pixar movie. Or the story, that's as gripping and full of romance and intrigue as Pirates Of The Caribbean. But we're getting ahead of ourselves. Forgive us, but we're just so excited that something that has taken so long to put together has turned out to be such a gem.



Captain Rhama is the hero of the hour, and it's clear from his chunky jawline, pasty moonface and oddly proportioned limbs that he has been designed by the creator of Lara Croft.

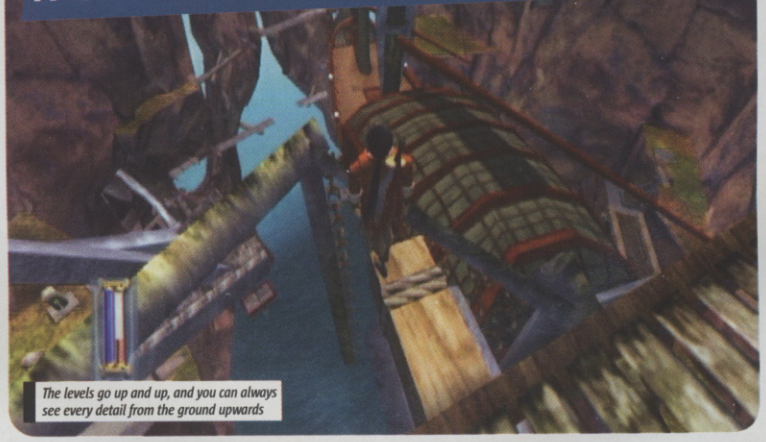
The story too has a whiff of Tomb Raider about it. Rhama is sucked into a web of intrigue as he explores the islands of the Forbidden Sea, tracking a mysterious stolen galleon, and the hidden powers and secrets it holds, negotiating catacombs and ancient towering settlements along the way.



We all know about abusing the herb here at CVG. We often spit our lunch out for using too much coriander

Rhama has a handy back-slash move for when he's surrounded by idiot pirates and needs to make a break for it

"THE CHARACTER ANIMATION AND VOICE ACTING ARE SO UNBELIEVABLE IT'S LIKE WATCHING A PIXAR MOVIE"



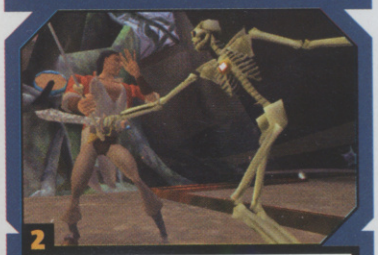
The levels go up and up, and you can always see every detail from the ground upwards

DEVIL ON THE PORT SIDE!

You'd expect to see scurvy-riddled sea dogs on your travels on the open seas, but how about giant man-eating crabs, devil monsters and all manner of angry sea beasts?

Different baddies require different tactics or weapons, but Rhama's got some ace moves and weaponry at his disposal. There are even special hidden swords and guns for you to sniff out.

1 ■ Look how titchy Rhama is compared to the size of this giant dude! How awesome is that?



2 ■ The skeletal spirits of departed pirates don't seem very happy to see Rhama and like to bite his legs

3 ■ Anyone would think you'd stepped off the boat onto Jurassic Park with all these giant dinos roaming around

4 ■ You can dispatch the enemy pirates with relative ease, and even hurl them off into the distance

MANY WAYS TO GLORY

Galleon rewards experimentation. Take this area for instance. You have to cross to the raised exit at the other side of the creepy cavern.

There are wobbly logs to scamper on, walls to climb, and even the power of nature to harness using a spurting geyser. You can tackle it any way you want to, and some methods may be trickier than others, but the end result is still the same. Ace.

■ Scamper atop the up-ended logs if you manage to stay aloft. Be quick, as they topple if you hang around

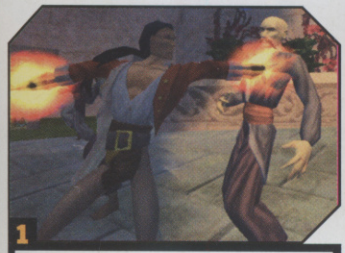
■ Letting the geyser spray you into the air means you avoid the wobbly logs and make it to the other side

■ Or, failing both these methods, find the climbable rock face and clamber your way to the exit

FLAMING FISTS OF FURY!

Fighting with Rhama, and later with Mihoko, is more fun than the ridiculously static point-shoot-leap backwards rubbish of Tomb Raider.

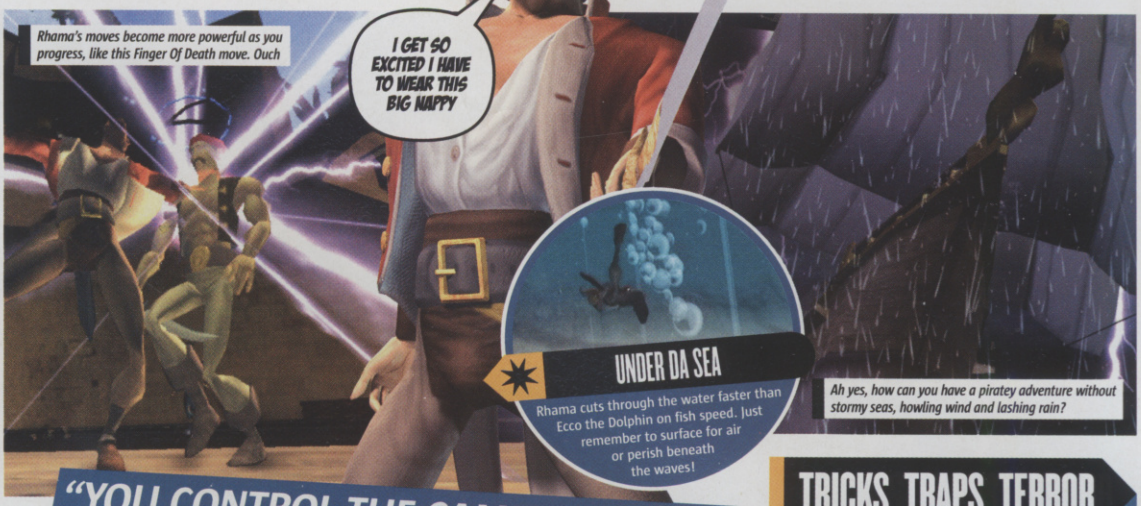
Combo attacks can be executed by easy button presses, and if you press the attack button again at the end of a strike you get flaming fists to really hurt the opposition. There are mega spells to unleash too.



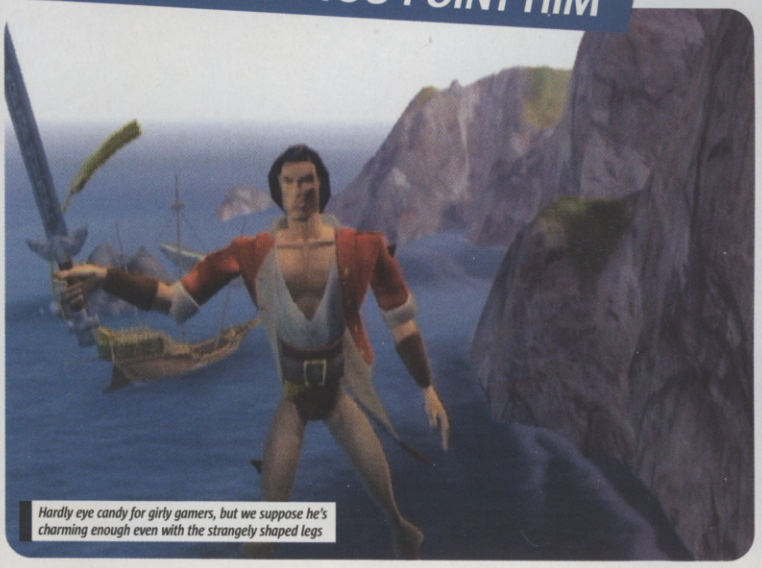
1 ■ *The glowing fists mean you've got a quick boost of power. Use it wisely to tear your rivals' hearts out*

2 ■ *The pirates will try and knock you off this tiny tightrope, but if you're quick you can zap 'em*

3 ■ *Execute combos one after the other and you can pull a special, bad guy-shredding move like this*



"YOU CONTROL THE CAMERA RATHER THAN RHAMA AND HE'LL FOLLOW WHERE YOU POINT HIM"



Hardly eye candy for girly gamers, but we suppose he's charming enough even with the strangely shaped legs

TRICKS, TRAPS, TERROR

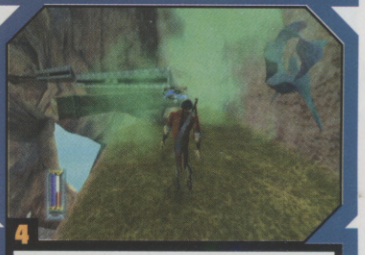
There's more than the angry wildlife to challenge you in Galleon. Each area is filled with deadly traps and natural obstacles to negotiate.

The scale of each of the areas is incredible, and you can easily fall to your doom if you're not careful as you scamper around. Make sure you're gentle with the stick to avoid tumbling to a bone-shattering death.

1 ■ *Stopping to admire the view is recommended as you can take stock and work out where to go next*

2 ■ *How will you operate the giant's machinery without falling to your death or getting squished in the cogs?*

3 ■ *What way now? The beams and struts are there to baffle you! There is always a safe route through, though*



4 ■ *Watch out for the spores hidden on rock faces as they'll make you dizzy and incapacitated for a while*

But the similarities to Tomb Raider end there. While Core Design seems to have been content with churning out the same old Lara game year after year, then spectacularly fouling it up with the PlayStation 2 version, Confounding Factor has taken everything that was good about Lara's adventures, and overhauled it all for the next generation – almost beyond all recognition.

Like, for instance, the way your heroes move. Every step, hop and run of each of the game's characters, like Rhama, love interest Faith or dirty sea dog Jabez is animated with delicate movements that perfectly suit each character's personality. Rhama stands proud, chest out, grabbing ledges and swinging swords with all the confidence of a veteran of the seas. Faith is timid and hesitant, Jabez is stealthy and slinky.

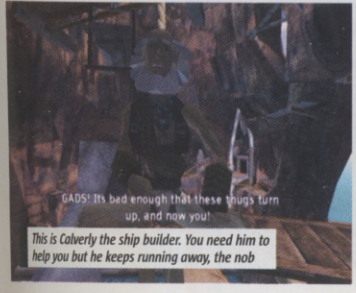
ONLY LOSERS FIGHT SOLO

Control too is sublime, though unusual. You control the camera rather than Rhama and he'll follow where you point him. Most of the time it amounts to the same thing as controlling Rhama himself, but really comes into its own when navigating tight areas: as long as you're gentle with the stick and point in the general direction you want to end up in, Rhama will obey.

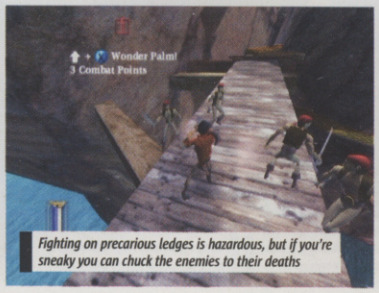
Better yet, it means when Rhama's dashing at a full, dizzying sprint, he'll automatically scamper across small obstacles or roll under gaps without you having to worry about timing any button presses or slowing down your gallop.

As soon as you recruit new characters during your quest, you can issue them commands using the intuitive inventory system. Using the right stick to cycle through options while still playing the game with the left stick if you want to, you can get Faith to heal Rhama or others, or get help negotiating puzzles. It's dead clever, and the witty way the heroes chat to each other while co-operating is perfectly in keeping with the strong story and character-driven gameplay (see Do As I Say Bee-Yatch, page 86).

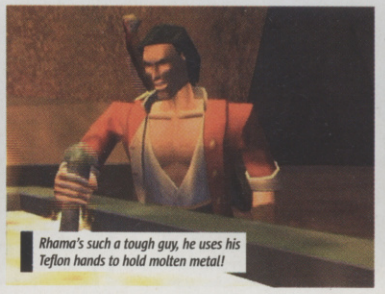
The puzzles themselves are as varied and imaginative as any found in The Wind Waker, and perhaps even more acrobatically demanding than the leaping and spinning of Prince Of Persia. They're totally logical too. At one point Rhama »



This is Calverly the ship builder. You need him to help you but he keeps running away, the nob



Fighting on precarious ledges is hazardous, but if you're sneaky you can chuck the enemies to their deaths



Rhama's such a tough guy, he uses his Teflon hands to hold molten metal!

■ No actioner is complete without a set of puzzles to beat. Often you'll need to team up with another character and use a

GIVE US A LIFT

combination of your own actions and theirs to win. This lift puzzle is a prime example of the game's co-operative puzzles.

Check the switches and the position of their corresponding lifts. Set them in the right position

Order Faith to pull the correct switch to move the lift you're on into position

Hop from the red lift to the green. Order Faith to pull the next lever in the sequence

Once at the top of the lift, activate a shortcut switch so Faith can join you with ease

"FORGET THAT IT WAS ALMOST LOST IN DEVELOPMENT HELL – AN ESSENTIAL GAMING EXPERIENCE"

By locking onto an object or item and instructing Faith to use or examine it, she can open magically sealed doors

Familiar action game areas are given a new twist thanks to the streamlined control and clever level design

GET YOUR END AWAY

From Rhama's cocky swagger, we get the impression he's used to bedding every nubile young maiden he meets. Expect muchos smoochies in the game.

Lions, tigers, bears, giant crabs... Galleon's got a rich bestiary that's for sure

Okay so the characters are angular, but the speed, fluidity and inertia of their movement is stunning

Defile the seahorse-nibbled bones of the dead viking's grave by nicking his hammer and peeing in the water

Faith says the sauciest things. She'd do well with a career on the Adult Channel

Climb on top of the giant crab and stab it in its pulpy head part to kill it

CVG 2ND OPINION

PAUL

We just got used to seeing this game around, incomplete, for such a long time that it lost its chance to make a huge first impression. However, the game design is so masterful that it makes you really wake up to the challenge. Also, the way I see it, the characters are terrific because they are so stylised. Tomb Raider was no accident – Galleon deserves to be huge!

PREVIOUS GAMES

■ There aren't any. Galleon is Confounding Factor's first game!

HARD FACTS

■ Over 30 hours of play
■ Six huge islands
■ Over five years in development!

DID YOU KNOW?

■ During the game's difficult development, Confounding Factor shed loads of staff until just Toby Gard and his devoted skeleton crew were left to finish the whole thing. Pretty bloomin' amazing really, considering how stunning the end result is.

Taking cannonballs in the chest really knocks chunks off of Rhama's energy bar. Avoid!

needs to fix a broken lift. There's no battery handily lying around, though. Instead, you need to find a peg to attach the lift car to the pulley, but when you find it the peg is bent out of shape.

It's up to you to find a fiery room where the boat-makers forge their metal and bend the peg back into shape. To do this though, you need to first find a hammer with which to mould the peg back into shape and some water to cool the whole thing down afterwards. It's entertaining, engaging and a totally believable way to fix the problem you've encountered.

There's usually more than one way to tackle the platform puzzles too (see Many Ways To Glory, page 84) and replaying sections you've previously struggled with to find new routes, new ways of winning and exciting secret treasures only adds to the pure 100 per cent proof feeling of joy you get from playing.

LOVING THE MAIN SAIL

Galleon's an awesome game, but it's hard to appreciate just how spectacular it is without seeing the thing in motion. When you see the intricacies of the character animation, or witness the precise way each beam, platform and trap has been designed so it sits in the perfect place for you to negotiate, that's when you understand just how much love and craft has gone into making Galleon a golden nugget of gaming excellence.

Ditch your preconceptions, forget the fact it was almost lost in development hell and simply accept it as one of the most essential videogame experiences of the moment. ✶

CVG VERDICT

LEE

GRAPHICS — 87
The style is a bit odd but the environments are enormous and inventive

SOUND — 93
The voices are amazing and the subtle musical flourishes are spot-on

GAMEPLAY — 94
Varied, fast, challenging and electrifying. It's bloody amazing!

LASTING APPEAL — 90
A massive game, with lots of secrets to discover in beaten levels

The equivalent of the summer's biggest Oscar-winning blockbuster, it's breathtaking, and destined to become an adventure classic. Totally unmissable.

OVERALL SCORE 92

HOW IT COMPARES
PRINCE OF PERSIA
GALLEON
TOMB RAIDER: AOD

DO AS I SAY BEE-YATCH

Rhama's a no-nonsense, rough and tumble kinda guy. He likes his women in their place: either at his side or doing what he tells 'em to.

By ordering Faith and Mihoko around, as well as the other heroes he meets, you can solve puzzles, receive items and generally have a much easier time navigating the game world. The interface is simple and makes interacting with your gal pals a treat.

■ Faith's most useful skill is to heal herself and others, but you'll need to grab magic bugs to power her up

■ Lock onto a target above and tell Faith to use it while standing below and you'll give her a boost-up

■ The interface is dead easy. Simply lock on, access the 'Characters' inventory sub-screen and order away!

RELEASE DATE
26 JUNE

GAME INFO
COST: £39.99
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONTACT INFO
* PUB: CAPCOM * DEV: CAPCOM
* WWW.CAPCOM-EUROPE.COM/MINISITES/ONIMUSHA_BLADE_WARRIORS/INDEX.HTML
* CONTACT: 08705 998877

PS2

Use the arcade style pick-ups to take out multiple enemies when you're overwhelmed

Movement is severely restricted to leaping up, down, and then up again. Yawn

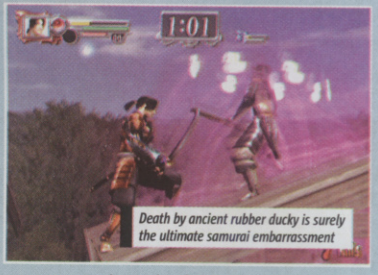
Absorb Orbs and unleash them at just the right moment to launch either a Fire, Wind or Thunder attack

In Story mode you'll be set specific tasks to fulfil within a very tight time limit

ONIMUSHA BLADE WARRIORS

Onimusha all-star slasher skewered on it's own sword

Vs Mode is where it's at, especially in the beautiful Crouching Tiger-style Bamboo Forest



Death by ancient rubber ducky is surely the ultimate samurai embarrassment

Of the idea of a multi-battle action fighting game featuring characters from the Onimusha series has you fingering your blade with sheer excitement, you may want to sheath that big boy for a bit before getting too carried away.

Sure, the concept sounds cool, but what concept doesn't? Even Michelle McManus probably seemed like a good idea in theory, and we all know how well that turned out.

In Onimusha Blade Warriors, you get to pick one of your favourite heroes or demons from the Onimusha series and either put them through a bunch of challenges in single-player Story Mode, or pit them against up to three of your mates in Vs Mode.

SUCKING HELL

It seems the sole reason for bothering to slog through the disappointing Story Mode is to build up your character's stats in order to use them in the infinitely superior Vs Mode. The limitations of movement in Story Mode are severe. Your character mainly moves from side to side, or jumps from level to level with all the speed and grace of a one-legged tortoise.

Using special moves to slice and dice your opponents is still fun, as are the usual soul-sucking antics, but through it all there's a strong cheesy whiff of a half-finished game that could never hope to live up to the previous standards set by Onimusha single-player games.

The Vs Mode is the main reason why most Onimusha fans will want to buy this, and they'll certainly find it more satisfying than Story Mode. Choose to battle with two, three or four other characters, and unlock other surprise characters (including Mega Man!) via Story Mode.

It's a good excuse to just go samurai-crazy, leaping around and slashing out with spectacular venom. The different arenas make an impressive backdrop to the carnage, and much of the scenery can be smashed up at the same time as the opposition. To further add to the strong arcade vibe, you can also open treasure chests and obtain pick-ups, some of which seem slightly less than historically accurate: rubber ducks and machine-guns in Sengoku-era Japan, anyone?

But overall, only die-hard Onimusha fans will want to bother with this one. *

PREVIOUS GAMES
- Resident Evil, Street Fighter, Onimusha: Warlords, Way Of The Samurai 2

HARD FACTS
- 24 characters to unlock
- Eight different Soul types to absorb, including Life and Victory
- Five types of healing medicinal items to collect

DID YOU KNOW?
- The character of Jubei Yagyu, who also appeared in Onimusha 2: Samurai's Destiny, was modelled on the likeness of the late Japanese actor, Yusaka Matsuda, who starred in the 1989 movie, Black Rain

A S-WORD TO THE WISE

Although there are some unusual pick-ups to be found in Onimusha Blade Warriors, the main weapon of choice is still the sword.

You'll learn to love the feel of cold steel in your hand as you plot dastardly new ways to slice your opponents into a thousand pieces, but you'll have to be quick as the battles are all very fast-paced.

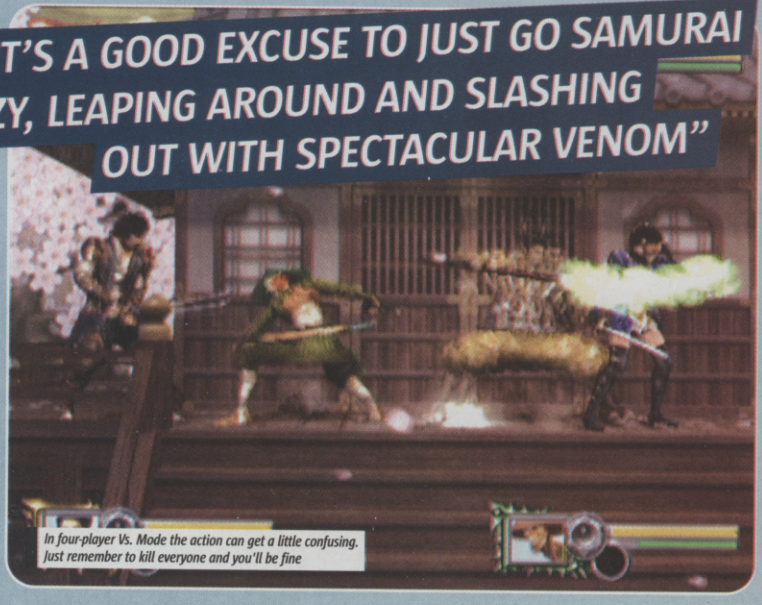
1
- It takes a high degree of timing and co-ordination to pull off the Hadoken, but practice makes perfect

2
- Special attacks can be spectacularly devastating, but charging them up can waste valuable seconds

3
- If you're too slow your opponent will gain the upper hand and leave you in a world of hurt

4
- The Finisher move enables you to deal the final deathblow to an enemy lying on the ground

"IT'S A GOOD EXCUSE TO JUST GO SAMURAI CRAZY, LEAPING AROUND AND SLASHING OUT WITH SPECTACULAR VENOM"



In four-player Vs. Mode the action can get a little confusing. Just remember to kill everyone and you'll be fine

MAURA

CVG VERDICT

GRAPHICS 68
The characters and magic effects look good, but cutscenes are dull

SOUND 69
suitably authentic and atmospheric music makes up for cheesy dialogue

GAMEPLAY 65
Very limited in Story mode, but the multiplayer battles are fun

LASTING APPEAL 60
Only hardcore Onimusha fans will want to keep playing

Seeing Jubei and Samanosuke together in the same game certainly has novelty appeal, too bad that the actual gameplay doesn't live up to the hype.

OVERALL SCORE 60

HOW IT COMPARES
DYNASTY WARRIORS 4
ONIMUSHA BLADE WARRIORS
CHAOS LEGION

LOG ON AND LOAD UP

Still hungry for more, even after thumbing through this game-packed issue of CVG? Logging onto **ComputerAndVideogames.com** will satisfy the biggest gaming appetites

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ON INFO!

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RELEASE DATE 7 MAY

GAME INFO COST: £39.99 PLAYERS: 1

CONTACT INFO
- PUB: VIVENDI UNIVERSAL
- DEV: SAFFIRE
- WWW.VANHELSINGGAME.COM
- CONTACT: 0118 9209100

CVG WORLD EXCLUSIVE REVIEW

VAN HELSING

We get biblical on the ultimate monster mash before anyone else, and holy crap it's good!

Holy Tojo blades glow with a blue frostiness that's particularly effective against the undead

These scimitar-wielding beasts are really fast and have a habit of dodging your attacks

There is a huge variety of enemies, more than in the movie itself

Here's the funny thing: Van Helsing features the world's most legendary monsters, but it's not scary. Okay, maybe a little bit, but definitely not sloppy-arse scary like Silent Hill or The Suffering.

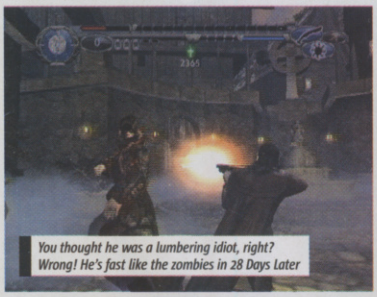
Don't be disappointed, though. Van Helsing has more than enough lumbering zombies, howling wolves, mental monsters and spooky locations to give even the hardest player damp thighs. The reason it's not scary is because Van Helsing himself is an a guru of ghost-grinding and monster-mashing.

How can you be scared when you know Van can kick the undead crap out of anything? From the start of the game Van's armed with double Tojo blades that spin in his fists like whirling dervishes of death, and twin pistols that he unloads like a Victorian John Woo action hero. Not bad. And it gets better: before long he's wielding a sawn-off shotgun, a spiked grappling hook that can drag zombies straight into a pre-wound Tojo uppercut, a gas-propelled crossbow and two razor-sharp scimitar blades.

VAN THE MAN

The point is Van Helsing is well hard. And it's a good job 'cos he's up against the biggest, baddest monsters ever committed to literature or caught on film. We've been excited about Van Helsing since we heard about the movie last September. Yeah, it's a movie license, but hold on – we gave Van Helsing pride of place on our cover (CVG 270) because we saw something special in amongst the monster-smackin'.

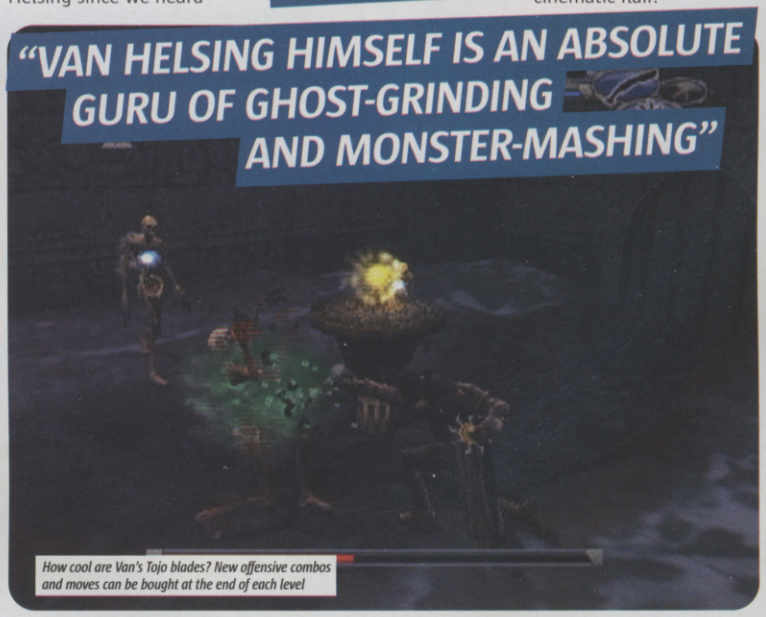
First off, it looks beautiful. Everything's perfectly gothic and coated with a sweet, sticky coat of melancholy. Van Helsing himself busts plenty of gangsta monster-hunting cool in his flowing coat, funky hat and meaty mutton-chops, and the cutscenes display an impressive level of cinematic flair.



You thought he was a lumbering idiot, right? Wrong! He's fast like the zombies in 28 Days Later

Frankenstein's Monster will pick you up by the throat, but you can still unload into his face

"VAN HELSING HIMSELF IS AN ABSOLUTE GURU OF GHOST-GRINDING AND MONSTER-MASHING"



How cool are Van's Tojo blades? New offensive combos and moves can be bought at the end of each level

MONSTER RUCKS

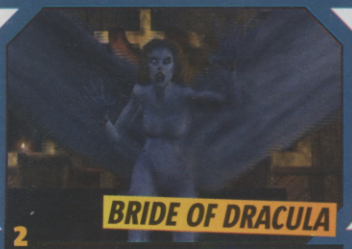
If Roman Abramovich was an evil mentalist and wanted to put together a top-notch line-up of monsters rather than the overpriced numpties he's assembled at Stamford Bridge, he'd be after the cast of Van Helsing.

Our favourite thing about the game is finding out which all-star monster we're going to demolish next. Here are some of the best:

FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER

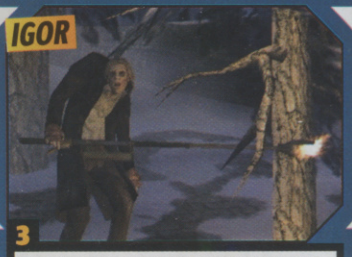
1 ■ He's a zombie. A type of zombie. He's a mish-mash of different bits. Hard as nails, too

BRIDE OF DRACULA



2 ■ Horny as hell and just as evil. Stick it right in her – a stake, that is...

IGOR



3 ■ Don't look at his back, he's very sensitive about it. Put him out of his misery with guns instead

WOLFMAN

4 ■ If we had to be a monster, we'd be Wolfman. He's fast, hairy and can bite the arse off a bus

HOLY WAR

Do you go to church? Probably not. Now, if some bible-basher came round your house with twin pistols and promised that you'd get a go on his sawn-off shotgun, gas-propelled crossbow and gatling gun if you went to Sunday's service, would you go? You're Goddamn right! Van Helsing's armed to the arse with holy weapons, and here's our pick of the very best...

■ Van starts with his trusty twin pistols. They fire fast and you can equip them with silver bullets

■ But to paint the town with zombie guts you've got to bust out the sawn-off. It packs a serious punch up-close

■ The crossbow's good against flying creatures, but sadly it won't penetrate stone skin

HOOK IT UP

Van's wrestling with the forces of evil – that's why he's so good at grappling.

The hero's nifty grappling hook has three main functions: to drag enemies into melee combat range (much like Scorpion's spear in the Mortal Kombat games), to get out of trouble in double-quick time, and to reach high platforms or cross massive gaps.

1

■ Whenever you see that red icon you can use your grappling hook to reach awkward areas

2

■ You can reach secret areas with your hook – keep an eye open for hidden hook spots

3

■ But the coolest use for the hook is plunging it into a zombie and dragging him towards you

Occasionally the static cameras produce cinematic gems like this. Eat that, zombie!

Some of the interiors are absolutely beautiful on PS2 and mind-blowing on Xbox

BLOODSUCKING BITCHES

Avoid Transylvanian women – they're hot but they suck. And not in a good way. Van comes up against plenty of Dracula's horny brides on his quest.

"EVERY TIME YOU COME UP AGAINST A NEW MONSTER YOU'RE FULLY EQUIPPED TO KICK THEIR DEMONIC ARSE"

Boss battles can often be a bit uninspiring, but it is cool facing off against such famous monsters

HORROR STORY

The adventure follows the plot of the film like flies follow the smell of a rotting zombie, and even includes some extra information about Van Helsing's shady past.

It's all told through the game itself and some snazzily-produced cutscenes that actually reward you for progressing rather than making the bridges between levels brain-stingingly boring.

1

■ It all starts in Notre Dame, Paris. Van's on the trail of the murderous Mr Hyde...

2

■ He's got bigger siders than Van and he's big as a rhino. Chop his arms off with your Tojos!

3

■ Then you get to go to Transylvania and meet hot Princess Anna. She's been cursed by Dracula

4

■ So it's off up the mountains to find the crafty Count himself. Nice bloke, but he sometimes sucks

It plays like Devil May Cry and Castlevania, but without the poncily-haired characters. Van kicks arse just as stylishly and acrobatically as Dante or Leon, but manages to look ten times harder doing it.

SCREAM TEAM

But Van Helsing's all about the monsters. As soon as you begin you face-off against Mr Hyde – Dr Jekyll's frickin' massive alter ego – followed by Frankenstein's Monster, the Brides Of Dracula, hunchback Igor and his arsenal of bazookas, and a huge Wolfman with claws like carving knifes. And that's just the first few levels.

But every time you come up against a new monster, you're fully equipped to kick their demonic arse. Van's not just packing – he's fast, too; analog stick movement is sharp and reactive, while jumping and dodge-rolling are wickedly instant. Coolest of all is Van's dodge-roll attack: hold the button and Van launches himself into the air mid-roll or slides on his back and squeezes out a couple of shots.

The constant combat benefits from this lightning speed. Stringing strikes together into chain combos is easy and satisfying, especially with the pad rumbling like a hungry werewolf's stomach every time you land a killer blow. It's nowhere near as cool as Ninja Gaiden's superb scrapping, but it's still coffin-loads of fun.

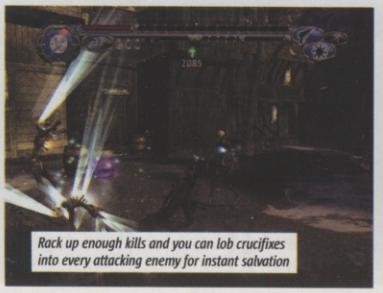
WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

Chaining combos is important because it lets you bust out Van's signature move. He's sanctioned by the Vatican to bash some biblical justice into the heads of Satan's mates, so his special weapon is a crucifix. Not a crap wooden cross, though. It's more like a holy Frisbee of death. When you've chained five kills together, tapping a shoulder button plunges this crucifix into the mushy skull of the nearest bad guy, exploding its head in a beautiful display of heavenly power. Amen!

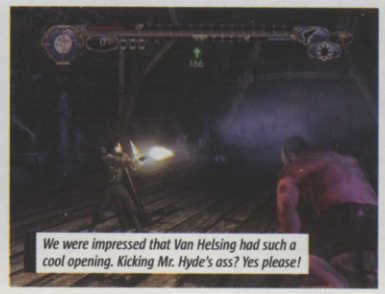
And then there's Van's alternative ammunition. Switching to these blessed bullets is essential if you're going to take down the meatiest monsters, 'cos they're specially prepared in God's own gun shop. Need to pop a cap in a werewolf? You need silver bullets doused in holy water, mate.

The variety of weapons is wicked and adds much more variety than DMC's dull sword and pistols or Castlvania's limp- »

Keep your distance and blast away - early zombies are slow and stupid



Rack up enough kills and you can lob crucifixes into every attacking enemy for instant salvation



We were impressed that Van Helsing had such a cool opening. Kicking Mr. Hyde's ass? Yes please!

■ What's the coolest thing to be seen with this season? A crucifix. Mel Gibson's God-bothering blockbuster The Passion Of

CRUCIFIX IT UP

The Christ is full of them, but Van Helsing's got the coolest one: it's sharp, silver and slices demons in half. Thank the sweet Lord!

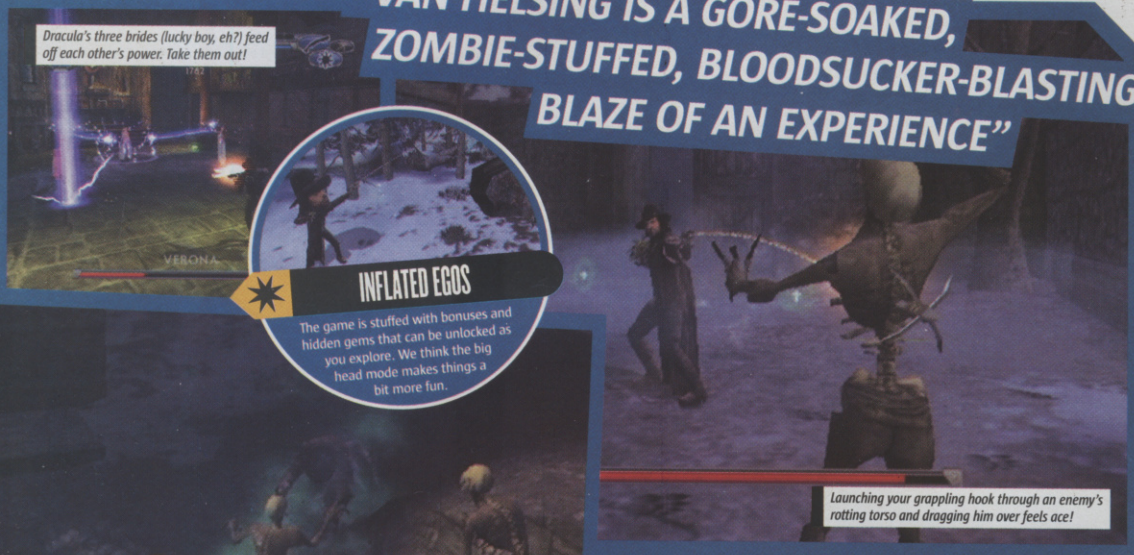
Chuck in some lightning fast combo blows then tap the shoulder button to lob your crucifix....

... It sinks into the beast's skull like a hot knife through warm zombie butter...

... and sends light streaming from its rancid bowels. Feel the power of the LORD...?

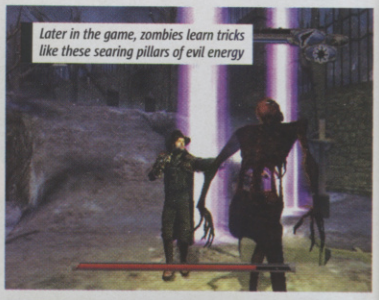
... Zombie dude certainly did – he's imploded in a shower of heavenly sparkles

"VAN HELSING IS A GORE-SOAKED, ZOMBIE-STUFFED, BLOODSUCKER-BLASTING BLAZE OF AN EXPERIENCE"



Dracula's three brides (lucky boy, eh?) feed off each other's power. Take them out!

Launching your grappling hook through an enemy's rotting torso and dragging him over feels ace!

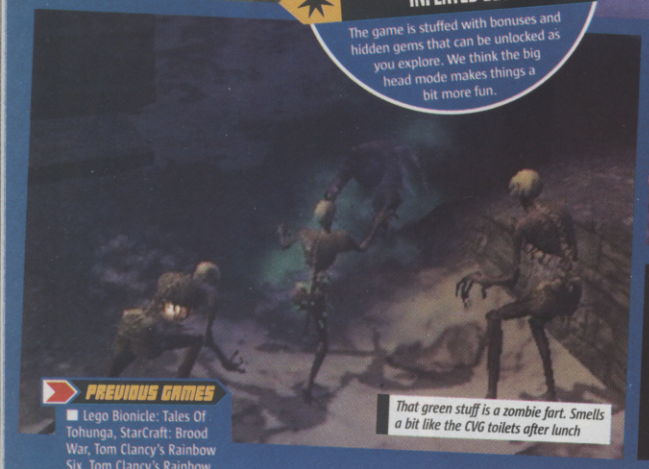


Later in the game, zombies learn tricks like these searing pillars of evil energy

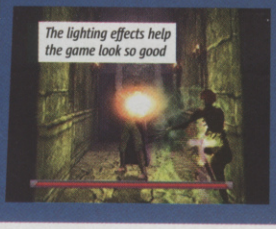
Once her fellow brides are dead, Marishka turns into a screaming bat-thing

INFLATED EGOS

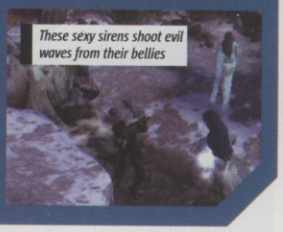
The game is stuffed with bonuses and hidden gems that can be unlocked as you explore. We think the big head mode makes things a bit more fun.



That green stuff is a zombie fart. Smells a bit like the CVG toilets after lunch



The lighting effects help the game look so good



These sexy sirens shoot evil waves from their bellies

PREVIOUS GAMES

■ Lego Bionicle: Tales Of Tohunga, StarCraft: Brood War, Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six, Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear

HARD FACTS

■ Number of levels: 13
■ Number of all-star monsters: 9
■ Number of weapons: 15
■ Number of hidden cheats: 24
■ Budget of Van Helsing movie: $150,000,000

DID YOU KNOW?

■ Abraham Van Helsing is the vampire hunter in Bram Stoker's original version of Dracula. Hugh Jackman is the tenth actor to play the role after old fart Anthony Hopkins and chipper gent Peter Cushing.

wristed whipping – there's something ace about riddling zombies with a bullet-spewing gatling gun. Figuring out which weapon to use against particular monsters adds a layer of strategy, and Van's holy ammunition and stylish crucifix kills are so sweet they almost made us go to church, hoping that we'd be playing paintball to prepare for an apocalyptic attack from Satan's hordes. We called and they weren't.

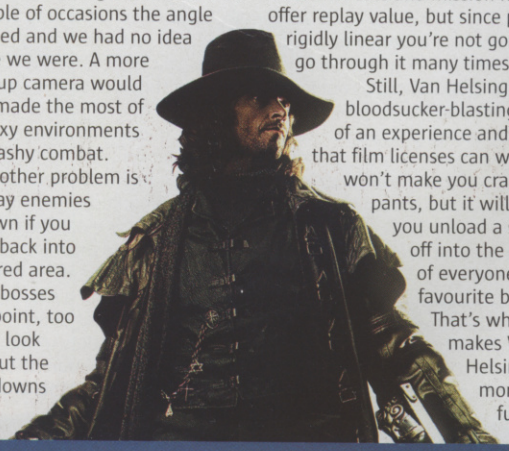
VISIONS OF HORROR

But like religion itself, for everything that's cool there's something that makes about as much sense as The Cheeky Girls' pop career. Can you guess our major complaint? Go on, third-person action game? Bingo! The camera sucks. The developers have gone for cinematic angles that pan and zoom and at times it looks cool, especially when the camera tilts to give a shot of your killer combo. Too often, though, it leaves you wandering in the distance, obscures attacking enemies and on a couple of occasions the angle changed and we had no idea where we were. A more close-up camera would have made the most of the sexy environments and flashy combat.

Another problem is the way enemies respawn if you move back into a cleared area. Some bosses disappoint, too – they look cool but the showdowns aren't as epic as DMC or Castlevania's set-piece brawls.

Van Helsing's easy as well. Even on normal mode you'll stake it through the heart pretty quickly. Hidden cheats and mission ratings offer replay value, but since play is rigidly linear you're not gonna go through it many times.

Still, Van Helsing is a bloodsucker-blasting blaze of an experience and proof that film licenses can work. It won't make you crap your pants, but it will let you unload a sawn-off into the belly of everyone's favourite beasts. That's what makes Van Helsing monster fun. ✷



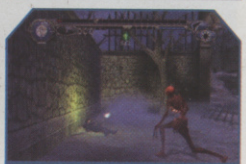
VAULTS OF HELL

Our man Van's not only equipped with some serious evil-eradicating weaponry – he's got more acrobatic moves than a crazy robotic monkey with rockets on its shoes (if robot monkeys wear shoes, that is).

He's no slouch at leaping around and attacking from the air with his Tojos, but our favourite move is his killer dodge-roll blast when Van rolls out of trouble then pops up and busts a cap. Booka!

■ Holding the roll button down launches Van into his dodge-roll attack. Handy against quick enemies

■ But sometimes you just need to get out of trouble, and Van's tumbling jobs do the job perfectly



■ Sliding backwards while unloading twin pistols looks cool and makes short work of zombies

CVG 2ND OPINION

ALEX

Believe it: Van Helsing the movie is going to rock. How do I know? Because the game follows the plot so closely. There are loads of twists we can't even tell you about! The game's resolutely linear and can't quite match up to other third-person slashers like DMC and Castlevania, but kicking Count Dracula right in the fangs makes up for it. Bloody good stuff.

CVG VERDICT

GRAEME

GRAPHICS 89
Atmospheric environments and awesome lighting effects let down by a dodgy camera

SOUND 91
Brooding music, cast voice acting, mushy death noises and booming gunshots

GAMEPLAY 78
Quick-fire combat and loads of cool enemies, but it's a wee bit repetitive

LASTING APPEAL 68
You'll play through it quickly and it's so linear you won't want to do it again

A stylish spin-off stuffed with so many holy weapons and demonic monsters it even makes church sound cool. A little too easy, but Van's still the man.

OVERALL SCORE 77

HOW IT COMPARES
NINJA GAIDEN
VAN HELSING
CASTLEVANIA

RELEASE DATE
21 MAY

GAME INFO
COST: £39.99
PLAYERS: 1-8

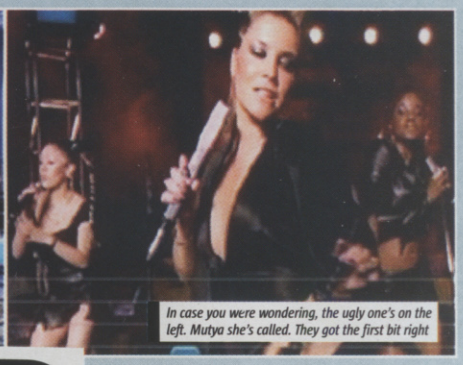
CONTACT INFO
- PUB: SONY
- DEV: SONY LONDON STUDIOS
- WWW.UK.PLAYSTATION.COM
- CONTACT: 0870 5998877

EXTRAS
- USB MICROPHONE ADAPTOR & MICROPHONES
- EYETOY (OPTIONAL)

PS2

If you're a bit of a wimp you can sing without the scoring, leaving you free to ogle at, er, Westlife

Chuck this on at a party when everyone's had a couple of 'funny' lemonades the place'll go mental



In case you were wondering, the ugly one's on the left. Mutya she's called. They got the first bit right

SINGSTAR

Making people feel awkward all over Britain. Until they get drunk, that is

Forget watching someone flailing their arms in front of EyeToy or flipping out on a dancemat. The funniest experience you can have with a PS2 is getting your gran to do the rap bit in that Mis-Teeq song.

And for that you'll need SingStar. The easiest way to describe it is EyeToy with a mic, or maybe karaoke on your PS2 – but that would be a disservice to the well brainy technology.

You pick a song, the words come up, and you make a twat of yourself as you realise the voice you thought sounded Bedingfield-esque in the shower ACTUALLY sounds like a cat in a blender.

But here's the clever bit: like in Konami's Karaoke Stage the PS2 goes all Simon Cowell and measures your singing against the notes of the song. The closer you get the more you score. It's brilliant and adds a gamey angle to the karaoke, even if it does encourage you to sing more like flat-voiced Stephen Hawkings than screamin' Justin Hawkins.

PREVIOUS GAMES
- EyeToy, This Is Football 2004, The Getaway, Hardware

HARD FACTS
- Number of songs: 29
- Number of two-player modes: three
- Party games: five
- Number of people we annoyed by playing SingStar in the office: 23

DID YOU KNOW?
- Singstar features Liberty X, Mis-Teeq, The Darkness, A-Ha, Pink, Jamelia, Motörhead, George Michael, Avril Lavigne, Petula Clark, Sophie Ellis-Bextor, Daniel Bedingfield, Carl Douglas, Rick Astley, Westlife, Ricky Martin, Madonna, Roy Orbison, Elvis, Deee-Lite, Sugababes, S-Club, Busted, Village People, Blondie, Good Charlotte, Dido, Atomic Kitten and Blue. Phew!

TOP OF THE POPS

But SingStar isn't really a game, it's a fancy karaoke machine with 29 songs. This is SingStar's trump card: every song is an original version and the video plays in the background making for a cool 'I'm on MTV' experience.

Sure, we prefer the way Konami's effort has an arrow showing you where to aim your pitch, but SingStar's licensed songs make Karaoke Stage look like that ugly one from the Sugababes.

The problem is not the songs, but how limited the selection is. The range is eclectic, but that means that there are songs you wouldn't touch with a crappy stick. Song books in real karaoke joints are thicker than Rik Waller's blubber gut, so we hope Sony release regular expansion discs. Thing is, you'll either really fancy SingStar or you'll think it sounds rubbish, in which case you probably think you're much cooler than you are but you also won't be reading this so we can say what we want. Nobheads.

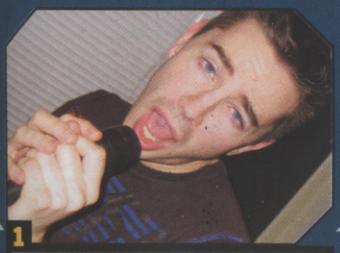
The important thing is that if you want to sing songs on your PS2, SingStar will make you very happy. Especially if you get your gran to do that Mis-Teeq rap. ✷

There's something for everyone, but if you love Busted you'll never sing Roy Orbison, and vice-versa

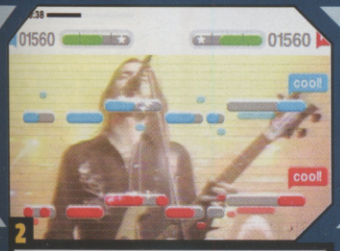
MICROPHONE CHECK

SingStar comes bundled with a USB adaptor and two mics, and bloody good they are too – big, heavy, and solid.

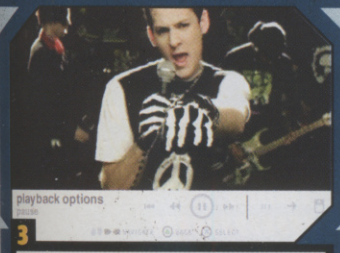
In fact, Mike was doing some Darkness-style microphone acrobatics the other day and walloped himself right in the nuts. Helped him reach the high notes better, mind. And the mics aren't SingStar's only cool feature either...



1 Here's our Lee showing off Daniel Bedingfield's trademark mic double-hander. Lovely



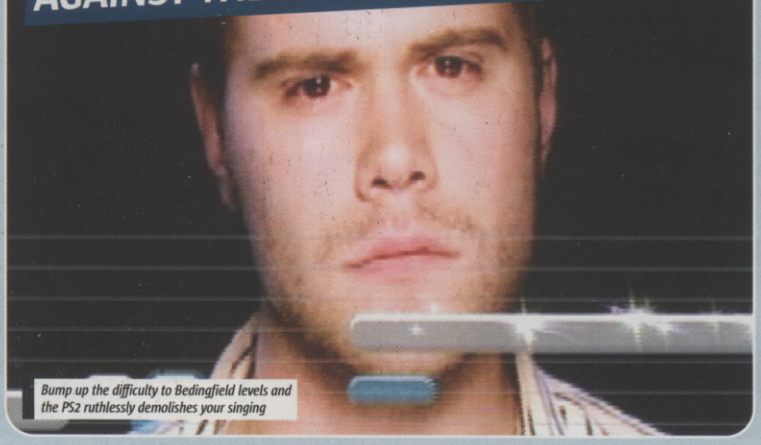
2 Two players can battle against each other on the same song. Motorhead's Ace of Spades: shouty



3 Record your howls then play them back, or save them to your memory card, and add vocal effects!

4 Or for the ultimate MTV experience link up an EyeToy to watch your hideous gurning on screen!

"THE PS2 GOES ALL SIMON COWELL AND MEASURES YOUR SINGING AGAINST THE NOTES OF THE SONG"



Bump up the difficulty to Bedingfield levels and the PS2 ruthlessly demolishes your singing

CVG VERDICT

GRAEME

GRAPHICS 88
It's really just music videos, but the menus are clean and the visuals are cool

SOUND 95
It's all CD-quality music so we could give it 100, but Paul's singing spoilt it for us all

GAMEPLAY 55
It's just singing, and Karaoke Stage does the voice recognition stuff a little better

LASTING APPEAL 68
Always a winner at parties, but for long-term fun you'll have to buy expansion discs

Hard to score, but the presentation is cool, the songs are fun and it's a laugh. If you reckon you're a pop idol, SingStar's your dream come true.

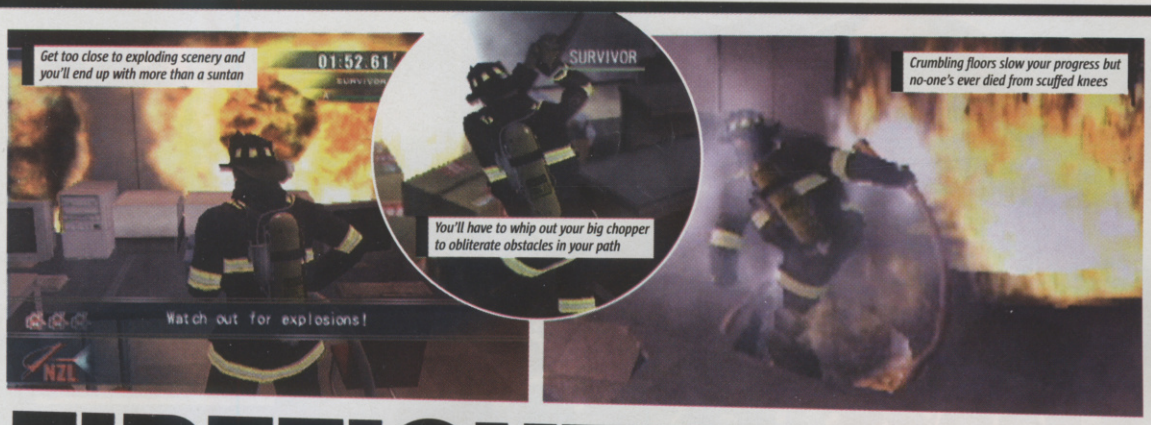
OVERALL SCORE 81

HOW IT COMPARES EYETOY: PLAY SINGSTAR DANCING STAGE

RELEASE DATE
NOW

GAME INFO
COST: £39.99
PLAYERS: 1

CONTACT INFO
- PUB: KONAMI
- DEV: KONAMI
- WWW.KONAMI.COM/FIREFIGHTER/
- CONTACT: 01895 462151



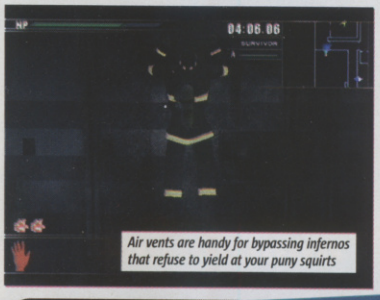
FIREFIGHTER FD18

Get your hoses out for some red hot squirting action

Who wouldn't want to be a fireman, eh? Polish up your shiny helmet and twiddle with your nozzle and the girls literally collapse at your feet. Okay, so it might be due to asphyxiation with all that smoke skulking about, but who's complaining?

Certainly not Dean McGregor, hell-bent on saving civilians before they turn up their toes like crispy bacon. Stepping into his shoes, you'll have to wield your mighty hose and spew watery justice on the rampaging flames, sprouting up around the city at the hands of maniacal arsonist.

The blazing arcade action keeps the pace blistering as you extinguish the wily infernos licking across the three main gaming areas. You'll need to use your noggin, as well as your nozzles, to quell the flames in your path and rescue the smouldering civilians before they're fricassee.



READY, AIM – FIRE!

Using the left analogue stick to manoeuvre, the right aims your squirter at your fiery foe, enabling accurate if somewhat slow-moving flame-fighting.

You've two main types of water blasts at your disposal and you'll need to use them strategically. One creates a wide-ranging, if weak, splutter which is great for dampening large areas quickly, and the other expels a limited single-direction but high-pressure watery blast.

Alongside your aquatic arsenal, you'll be smashing through barriers with your sharp-edged chopper, shimmying through air vents and collecting key cards to progress.

At first, the gameplay feels as intense as the heat, with the unquenchable blazes burning your boots and huge chunks of scenery collapsing around you.

Walls of fire like this are best tackled with your wide-ranging spray appendage

PREVIOUS GAMES
- Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Cy Girls, Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes, Castlevania

HARD FACTS
- Three fire-riddled locations to explore, subdivided into bite-sized rescue missions
- Two different nozzles and a jet cannon to tackle the raging blazes

DID YOU KNOW?
- The longest motorcycle ride through a tunnel of fire was achieved by stuntman Nigel Nicholson in 2000. The flames spanned almost 50m with temperatures over 800°, and was achieved with no protective clothing other than a balaclava. Nutter!

As you learn the ins and outs of each level though, the limited and repetitive nature of the dousing action becomes all too apparent. Most fires don't take much more than a few blasts of water to smoulder out of existence, and memorising the explosions to make it through a level unscathed quickly becomes tiresome.

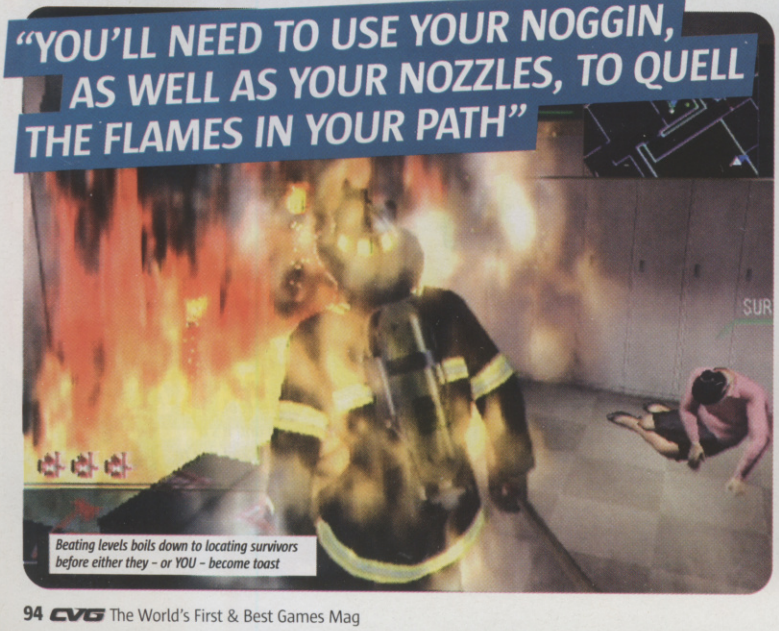
For a while at least, Firefighter provides a refreshing, unique and atmospheric challenge. Unfortunately, the whole thing soon buckles under the limited scope of its premise resulting in an experience that, while interesting and unusual, won't set your pants ablaze. ✶

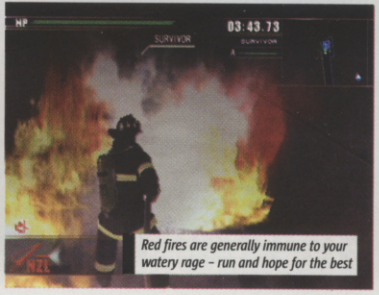
The blistering boss blazes lack realism but demand some cunning to extinguish

FRIED FROM ALL SIDES

Firefighter keeps the heat on with a constant stream of impressive scripted set pieces.

Generally, these involve massive structure-wrenching explosions and hulking great lumps of debris being tossed in your direction. Plenty of these can lead to instant frizzly death so getting through a level unscathed often boils down to memorising and avoiding them next time around. Flaming frustrating.





CVG VERDICT

GRAPHICS — 73
Unremarkable in-game scenery, but the creeping fire and explosions look great

SOUND — 71
Meaty explosions but the voice acting is weak and the score repetitive

GAMEPLAY — 58
The initial firefighting thrill soon wears off due to the limited gameplay mechanics

LASTING APPEAL — 56
With only three areas and little to tax you it's a fairly short romp through

It's nice to see something a bit different hitting these shores, but once the hose-wrangling novelty wears off, there's not much left to hold your interest.

OVERALL SCORE 57

HOW IT COMPARES
- BURNING RANGERS
- FIREFIGHTER F.D.18
- MARIO SUNSHINE

RELEASE DATE
OUT NOW

GAME INFO
COST: £19.99
PLAYERS: 1

CONTACT INFO
- PUB: TDK MEDIACTIVE
- DEV: STARSPHERE INTERACTIVE
- WWW.STARSPHERE.COM
- CONTACT: 01805 83542637

PS2 XBOX

STAR TREK: SHATTERED UNIVERSE

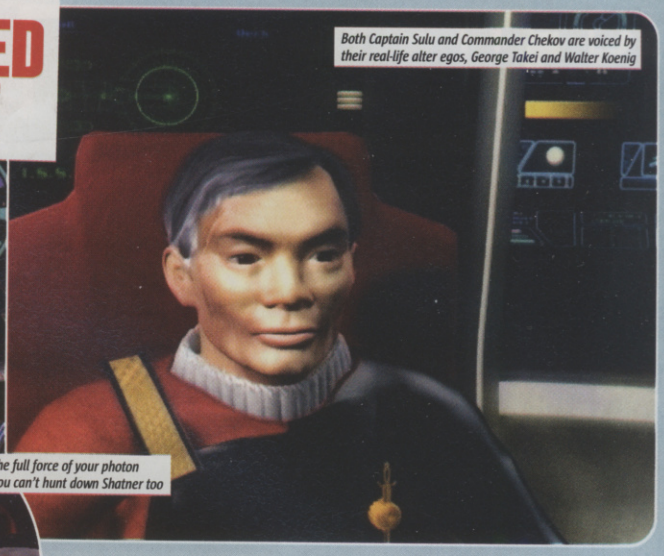
B-list Trek stars for a B-list space opera

Attacking from crazy angles makes you wanna vom but it's effective against tooled-up starships like the evil Enterprise

They call this cradle a dry dock, but like, there's no water in space...

The visuals are plain: the laser fire and explosions barely make up for the bland universe you fly around

The ISS Hood feels the full force of your photon torpedoes. Shame you can't hunt down Shatner too



Both Captain Sulu and Commander Chekov are voiced by their real-life alter egos, George Takei and Walter Koenig

You'd think given the potential of the Star Trek licence that any new game would give you the chance to play as a cool character. Kirk, Picard, Janeway – heck, we'd even settle for Wesley Crusher. But Shattered Universe gives you Sulu and Chekov. Huh?

Still, the scenario's actually pretty cool. Captain Sulu is zapped into a mirror universe with an evil Empire instead of the Federation, and pitched against the evil twin of his former compadre Chekov. The game is split into 20 space-battling missions, with asteroid-sized chunks of story thrown in.

Objectives are often simple, like destroying waves of fighters while protecting Sulu's ship, but the fast pace and satisfying shooting makes up for the often repetitive nature of the missions.

Mastering the thrust and reverse controls to hunt down the enemy is more satisfying than applying nipple electrodes to The Games' Jodie Marsh, and you're rewarded with sexy new ships to pilot as the story progresses.

It's fun then, but next to the visual magnificence of Cube's Rogue Squadron series, this looks like a clumsy kid's drawing. Flat textures, static backdrops and bog standard explosions spoil a lot of the game's atmospheric potential too. ✷

CVG VERDICT

If you're a Trek nut you'll easily see past the grotty visuals through to the solid blasting beneath, but non-fans won't get far beyond the word 'shat' in the title.

OVERALL SCORE 68

HOW IT COMPARES
- ZOE THE 2ND RUNNER
- STAR TREK: SHATTERED UNIVERSE
- STAR WARS REBEL STRIKE

RELEASE DATE
OUT NOW

GAME INFO
COST: £19.99
PLAYERS: 1-2/1-4(GC)

CONTACT INFO
- PUB: TAKE 2
- DEV: CLIMAX
- WWW.CLIMAX.CO.UK/
- 01753 496600

ONLINE GAMING
- 1-8 PLAYER DEATHMATCH (PS2 ONLY)

PS2 NINTENDO GAMECUBE

SERIOUS SAM: NEXT ENCOUNTER

Seriously, it's actually pretty mental blasting action

Realistic World War II and Vietnam shooters suck ass. Think about it: you're sneaking along in the undergrowth, with a crappy old weapon instead of a laser blaster, when all of a sudden you take a cap as a sniper takes you out from miles away. Care to wait until you respawn to suffer the same fate again? Didn't think so. Go get Serious Sam: Next Encounter instead.

You visit so many sunny locations and beautiful hotspots that it's like going on holiday, only with blood everywhere

It's fast, furious and the complete opposite of those tactical and realistic shooters that seem so unfathomably popular right now. Maraud through 40 high-speed levels that span the globe, having a laugh while taking out wave after wave of ridiculous enemies.

It's simplistic but there are so many enemies to shred you can't help but cackle as you tear up the screen with your bazooka, chainsaw and twin pistols.

Multiplayer options include eight-player deathmatching online or two-player co-op offline, where deathmatching on PS2 is limited to two challengers, though Cube manages four-player. Single player is the most fun, as it's so mental.

Serious Sam is a simple game, but it's cheap and brash enough to be a happy antidote to all the po-faced guff of Tom Clancy et al. Great stuff. ✷

The weapons list is extensive and you're very unlikely to get bored of all the artillery on offer

Um, maybe now is the time to rethink your strategy to include running away crying to your mummy

This is our kind of sniping – in Sam you can blast the wings off the monsters!

CVG VERDICT

Bright, brash and definitely a bit stupid, but that is partly the game's charm too. The budget price makes it worth a look for a brainless blasting laugh.

OVERALL SCORE 70

HOW IT COMPARES
- TIMESPLITTERS 2
- SERIOUS SAM
- UNREAL II

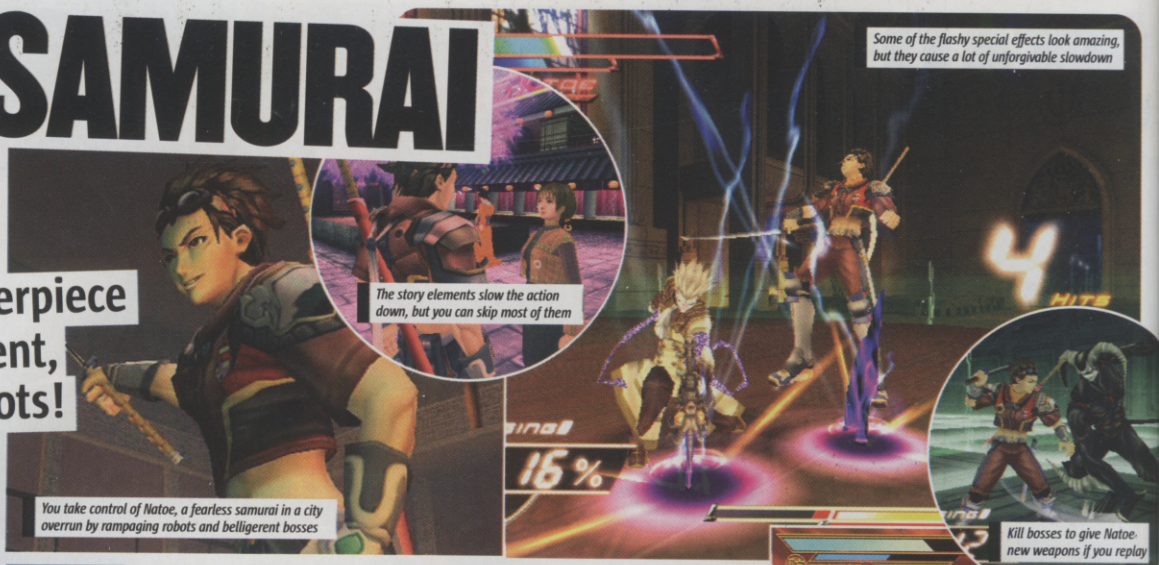
RELEASE DATE
NOW

GAME INFO
COST: £29.99
PLAYERS: 1

CONTACT INFO
- PUB: SEGA
- DEV: SAMMY STUDIOS
- WWW.SAMMYSTUDIOS.COM/GAMES/SS/
- CONTACT: 020 8995 3399

SEVEN SAMURAI 20XX

Japanese movie masterpiece gets the PS2 treatment, now with added robots!



You take control of Natoe, a fearless samurai in a city overrun by rampaging robots and belligerent bosses

The story elements slow the action down, but you can skip most of them

Some of the flashy special effects look amazing, but they cause a lot of unforgivable slowdown

Kill bosses to give Natoe new weapons if you replay

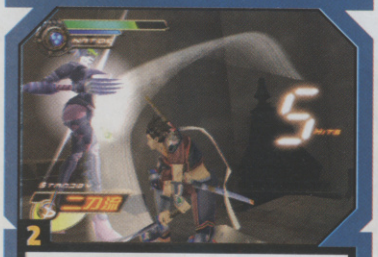
The boss characters are beautifully designed, but no harder to beat than their marauding minions

DOUBLE DICING DELIGHT

To attack enemies, all you have to do is push the stick in their direction and pound away at the attack button.

As soon as you draw the hero's second sword a meter begins counting down, and if it runs out you'll have to use a single blade again. But you can replenish the meter by using timing-based 'Just' moves, where you block or dodge attacks.

1 ■ Battles begin when you walk into a location and green walls appear, stopping you from running away



2 ■ By dodging and blocking you fill a meter, increasing the amount of time you can use two swords at once

3 ■ You can use just one sword to attack your enemies, but this is useless against many of the faster foes

4 ■ When you have two swords drawn the meter counts down, but it's easy to fill as you battle

Quick history fix: in 1954, Japanese film director Akira Kurosawa released Shichinin No Samurai, an epic tale of honour and courage where a ragtag group of warriors protect a small village from invaders.

When released in the West it quickly became one of the most successful Japanese films ever and inspired Hollywood rip-offs like western The Magnificent Seven. With such a strong filmic heritage, the PS2 developers had all they needed to make a thrilling action adventure. Sadly, they opted for a shallow hack 'n' slash snoozeathon set in a garish futuristic world instead. Ho hum...

PREVIOUS GAMES
- Lethal Skies
- Guilty Gear X2
- Galerians: ASH

HARD FACTS
- It may be called Seven Samurai, but there's only one playable character
- There are over 100 characters to meet and slaughter as you explore the neon-lit levels

DID YOU KNOW?
- Many of the characters were designed by legendary comic artist Moebius, who also worked on movies such as The Fifth Element and Willow

The final battles require a little more strategy, but most of the time you'll just be tapping the attack button

FUTURE IMPERFECT

While Kurosawa fans hate that Sammy has shifted the story from Feudal Japan to a space-age landscape, the game offers a stylish spin on its source material. The plot is essentially the same, with the film's shabby bandits replaced by endless hordes of bloodthirsty robots and beefed-up bosses.

The slick graphics do a fine job of recreating Kurosawa's black and white movie as a manga-style adventure, and the game's cocky young hero and a doe-eyed heroine will be familiar to devotees of Japanese animation.

But despite Sammy's best efforts, the clichéd story is a waste of time as the game is a simple, button-bashing hack-fest. The plot elements only disrupt the fast pace and most players will just opt to skip them anyway. But if the plot elements are annoying, it's nothing compared to the game's cheesy combat.

Seven Samurai features a neat combo system where you use two swords to slice up multiple enemies. However, filling the power bar to unleash the second blade requires little more than dodging and blocking attacks – a system that allows you to use double swords throughout most of the game and reach the final boss in a single sitting.

Even worse, the hero's special attacks are accompanied by flashy special effects that add to some spectacular slowdown, often making it impossible to follow the juddering action in large group battles. Overall, Seven Samurai 20XX squanders one of the best licences in gaming history and will probably have Kurosawa spinning in his grave. ✷

"THE HERO'S DOUBLE-SWORD ATTACKS ARE ACCOMPANIED BY FLASHY EFFECTS THAT ADD TO SPECTACULAR SLOWDOWN"

The more robots and effects appear on screen, the more the game judders

DAVE M

CVG VERDICT

GRAPHICS — 76
Colourful and stylish, but the slowdown makes them difficult to appreciate

SOUND — 60
Bangin' techno tunes complement the action, but they soon become irritating

GAMEPLAY — 62
We've got nothing against hack 'n' slasher games, but slowdown ruins the experience

LASTING APPEAL — 71
Unlocks weapons for when you play the game again, but it's unlikely you'll want to

Seven Samurai 20XX is a deeply disappointing experience that barely appeals to hack 'n' slash nuts and fans of Kurosawa's masterpiece.

OVERALL SCORE 62

HOW IT COMPARES
- DYNASTY WARRIORS 4: XL
- SEVEN SAMURAI 20XX
- LORD OF THE RINGS: ROTK

RELEASE DATE
NOW

GAME INFO
COST: £39.99
PLAYERS: 1

CONTACT INFO
- PUB: CAPCOM
- DEV: ACQUIRE
- WWW.ACQUIRE.CO.JP/SAMURAI2/E_TOP.HTML
- CONTACT: 020 8846 2550

It's nice to see Marilyn Manson branching out into the world of videogames

The townspeople are suspicious of you at first, but will warm to you if you treat them kindly

In ancient Japan, the penalty for wearing a basket on your head was decapitation by a man in sandals

Aerial attacks are a good way to catch your opponent off-guard, and dry your hair quickly

WAY OF THE SAMURAI 2

Dress like a woman, fight like a man and die like a bitch, samurai-style

Life for a samurai is tough. You must wear floaty dressing gowns yet still appear hard as nails. You must be ruthless enough to slice people into tiny chunks, yet also be nice to little children and grannies.

No wonder so many samurai take time off for stress-related illness. The original Way Of The Samurai portrayed the samurai's eternal struggle, including the consequences of his actions. It found a cult audience, hence the sequel.

The game is set in the Edo period of Japanese history, which lasted from 1603 to 1868. You play a masterless, or 'ronin', samurai warrior who arrives on the fictional island of Amahara.

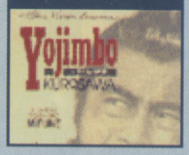
Right from the very first moment you're presented with a choice that determines how the rest of the game plays out. A girl offers you some food. Depending on how you answer her, you may trigger off a scene where she is intimidated by the local Yakuza Aota Gang, and you get the chance to help her, or she may just wander off.

From that point on it's all about choice. Do you align yourself with the townspeople, the Magistrates or the Aota thugs? Everything you do will have consequences, and there are several branching plotlines and endings. The question is, will you care enough to play the game more than once?

PREVIOUS GAMES
- Way Of The Samurai, Tenchu 2: Stealth Assassins, Tenchu: Shinobi-Hyakusen

HARD FACTS
- Over 400 possible attack combinations
- There are just two types of slashing attack and three types of kick
- You start the game with three characters and three outfits to choose from, but more can be unlocked each time you restart

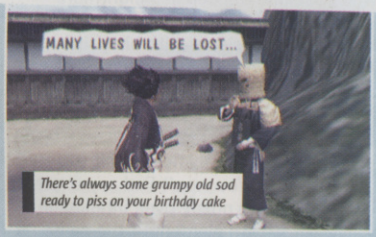
DID YOU KNOW?
- The original Way Of The Samurai was heavily influenced by the 1961 Akira Kurosawa samurai movie, Yojimbo. This was in turn remade in 1967 by Sergio Leone, as the classic Clint Eastwood spaghetti western, A Fistful of Dollars.



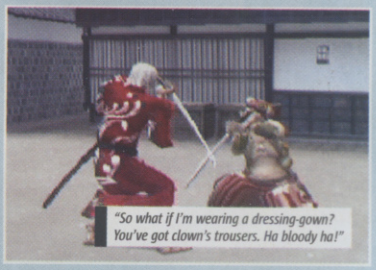
RONIN ON EMPTY

The story is set over ten days rather than the original's three, and there are more villagers to interact with. But the basic premise remains the same, and each of the ten days is still very short. No matter who you choose to work for, the missions are very simple, involving delivering parcels or meting out rough 'justice'.

The RPG elements are thin, mainly revolving around the type of sword that you equip. The swordfights do have a degree of depth to them; you can unlock different combos and pick up fresh weapons from corpses, for instance. But, if you're looking for anything more substantial in the overall gameplay, you'll wind up disappointed. ✷



There's always some grumpy old sod ready to piss on your birthday cake



"So what if I'm wearing a dressing-gown? You've got clown's trousers. Ha bloody ha!"

DYING FOR A SLASH

If wandering about talking to people gets a little boring by the second or third play, you could always develop your swordfighting skills.

In fact, there are certain points in the game where you'll get slaughtered unless you've managed to master the complicated intricacies of thrusting, parrying and blocking. Playing with your weapon makes sense, and it feels good too.

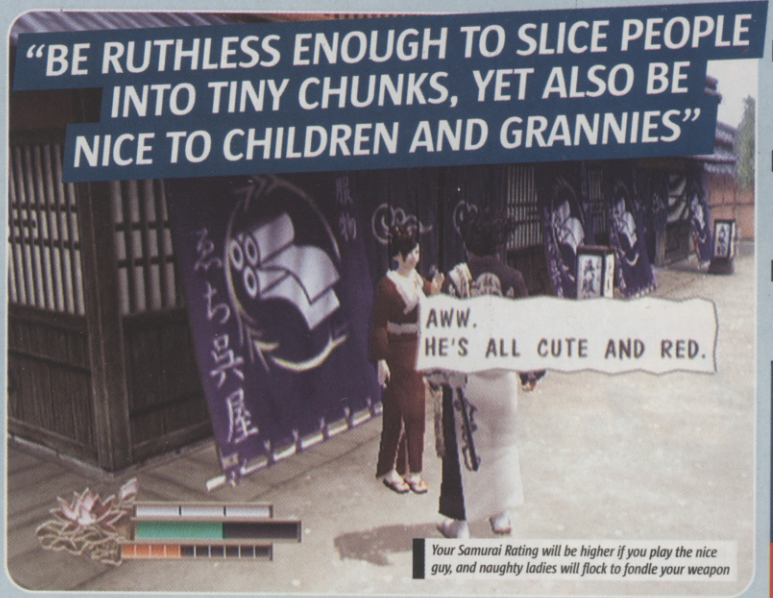
1 Muto will shred you to fleshy ribbons if you don't practise your swordfighting skills and get good

2 Head for the Shikano-cho Dojo to learn technique from the masters. Watch your health though – practice is serious!

3 The more inventively you slash away at your opponent, the more chance you have of unlocking special combos

4 The Spring Festival is a pivotal point in the game: you'll face a long and bloody battle, either alone or with allies

"BE RUTHLESS ENOUGH TO SLICE PEOPLE INTO TINY CHUNKS, YET ALSO BE NICE TO CHILDREN AND GRANNIES"



Your Samurai Rating will be higher if you play the nice guy, and naughty ladies will flock to fondle your weapon

CVG VERDICT

GRAPHICS 60
The Japanese buildings look okay, but there's nothing here to strain the PS2

SOUND 59
The traditional soundtrack is pretty, but gets repetitive, as do the villagers' generic grunts

GAMEPLAY 63
Tasks are too simple, yet the swordfighting is too complicated for the casual gamer

LASTING APPEAL 64
Quite short, and playing the same game over and over again wears thin pretty fast

It's got the basics in place, but that just isn't enough. Ultimately there are superior role-playing and swordfighting games out there.

OVERALL SCORE 62

HOW IT COMPARES
- DYNASTY WARRIORS 4
- WAY OF THE SAMURAI 2
- SHENMUE II

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

GAME INFO: COST: £29.99 PLAYERS: 1

CONTACT INFO:
- PUB: DREAMCATCHER
- DEV: PEOPLE CAN FLY
- WWW.PAINKILLERGAME.COM
- CONTACT: 09062 165432

ONLINE GAMING:
- 2-16 PLAYERS.
- MODES INCLUDE DEATHMATCH AND CAPTURE THE FLAG

PAINKILLER

There's hell to play in this insanely brutal blood-splattering shooter

Some England football fans in full fancy dress get a bit rowdy

A rocket launcher strike has just ignited a barrel of explosives, obliterating every nearby enemy and sending a torrent of blood and guts splashing down the stairs.

If you've always loved shooters such as Doom and Quake, you're going to be cock-a-hoop over the rip-roaring, violent 3D shooter Painkiller.

The storyline (explained in some long and dull cutscenes) features your character, Daniel Garner, a normal bloke who's become trapped in a nightmare world between Heaven and Hell after being killed in a car accident with his girlfriend. To earn your angel wings, you must storm through 24 tough levels, blasting every zombie, necromancer, banshee and servant of Satan back to Hades.

Painkiller is strictly no-bullshit run-and-gun gameplay. You won't find any strategy bits, statistics to puzzle over, intelligent sniping or stealth elements – the game doesn't even have a crouch button! It's just kill everything that moves into view as quickly as possible, and watch the scattering limbs and crimson liquid stain your PC's monitor screen.

Go on, give her a kiss. But make sure it's a really sloppy one, with tongues

BLOODY HELL

Every beautiful-looking level has a wildly different setting AND new enemies, as well as a few nasty surprises and cunning traps to catch you with your Y-fronts down. Witness spooky graveyards packed with ghouls and witches, decaying asylums teeming with inmates wearing straitjackets, and industrial complexes overrun by gas mask-adorned skeletal soldiers.

There are so many great touches that give Painkiller its sick sense of humour that there's not enough space here to mention them all; the zombies that grab chunks of their own intestines to throw at you; the suicidal monsters that run towards you carrying a massive fizzing barrel of dynamite; the witches on broomsticks that zoom overhead, cackling like your auntie after a few glasses of port at Christmas.

PREVIOUS GAMES

- Painkiller is the first game from new developer on the block, People Can Fly

HARD FACTS

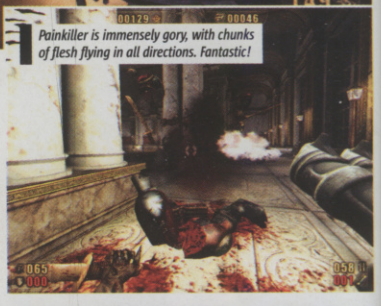
- There are a total of 24 levels, made up of five chapters always finishing with a boss battle.
- Painkiller uses Havok 'ragdoll' physics – the same system used in both Deus Ex: Invisible War and the forthcoming Half-Life 2.
- Painkiller has over 26 enemies – and that's not including the massive end-of-level bosses.

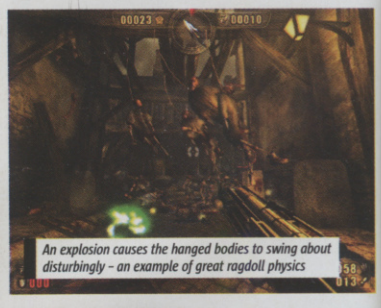
DID YOU KNOW?

- Some of the Polish development team that created Painkiller, previously worked on the X-COM-style role-playing game, Odium.

STAKE AND CHIPS

Although there are only a total of five weapons, each has a dual fire mode for wildly different kills, with the Stakegun a work of twisted genius. Fire sharp wooden stakes at baddies, pinning their bodies to walls and ceilings and sending them flying helplessly into the air – the game's excellent ragdoll physics always in action. Okay, so Painkiller is about as intelligent as your PE teacher, but it's still an extremely gory and funny 3D blaster that's worth selling your soul for. ✶


Painkiller is immensely gory, with chunks of flesh flying in all directions. Fantastic!


An explosion causes the hanged bodies to swing about disturbingly – an example of great ragdoll physics

Look at the mess you've made! You'll have to clear that up if you want to go to Heaven

BIG BOSS!

Painkiller's end-of-level bosses are HUGE – even dwarfing some of the large fellas in Nintendo's Zelda and Metroid games.

There are a total of five freakish behemoths to destroy, with each one possessing a weak point. And you have to discover it pretty darn quick or they'll hammer you relentlessly into a pile of steaming man-mush.

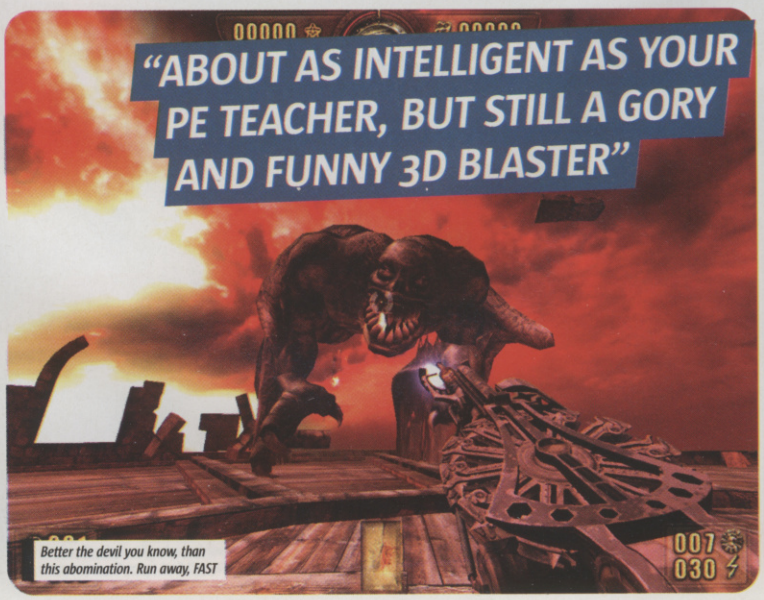
1 ■ The first big boss man. He's massive, but some straightforward shooting should finish him off. Shouldn't it?

2 ■ Oh, he's now sending some nasty minions to attack you as well. Just keep blasting away...

3 ■ Heck. The giant has broken free of his metal chains and is trying to squash you like a bug

4 ■ Arse! He's now flinging molten rocks and using his breath to form giant destructive tornadoes. Aaaaaagh!

A train commuter takes his frustration out on the station staff



Better the devil you know, than this abomination. Run away, FAST

CVG VERDICT

JAMIE

GRAPHICS 90
Gorgeous, detailed levels with superb enemies, ragdoll physics and plenty of gore

SOUND 86
Atmospheric and funny sound effects, plus a heavy techno-rock soundtrack

GAMEPLAY 80
Straightforward shooting with daft enemies, but it keeps the action coming thick and fast

LASTING APPEAL 78
Great replayability in the short term, but you'll tire of it after a couple of weeks

In-your-face blasting, with great graphics and physics. Not the most sophisticated gameplay, but the bloodthirsty action will keep your trigger-finger happy.

OVERALL SCORE 84

HOW IT COMPARES: FAR CRY, PAINKILLER, UT 2004

RELEASE DATE
NOW

GAME INFO
COST: £39.99
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONTACT INFO
- PUB: CAPCOM
- DEV: SPIKE
- WWW.R-SPIRITS.NET
- CONTACT: 08705 998877

PS2

RIDING SPIRITS II

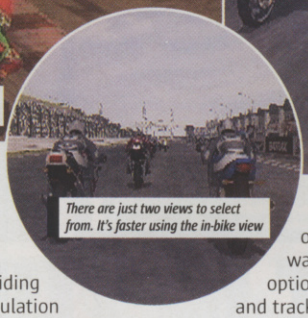
Ride hard, ride fast – just don't graze your helmet

This damn Suzuka track appears in every bike racing game. We're sick of it, frankly

While learning new tracks, hang back and watch how the AI controlled riders tackle it

Look behind you with the Triangle button to see who's choking on your exhaust and who's trying to take you

The view is fixed to in-bike in two-player mode so this is the only way you'll ever see two bikes on screen at once



There are just two views to select from. It's faster using the in-bike view

You want scary? Short of being forced to share a house with the combined casts of Back To Reality and Celebrity Fit Club, there's nothing more terrifying than bike racing.

Haring around hairpins at insane speeds, kneepads scraping the tarmac, gravity and the elements against you, it's the sport that makes mothers weep drops of pure fear at the certainty of their offspring's imminent demise. Yet while Riding Spirits is a comprehensive simulation of the sport, it fails to capture the insane, adrenaline-pumping thrills of the real thing.

With over 300 hogs to squeeze between your leathered thighs and tune-up options all over the place, it's the biggest biking simulation around. There are 15 courses that mix original designs with real world Japanese tracks like Suzuka (oh no, oh yes!) and Twin Ring Motegi. You can make the game as hardcore or arcade-like as you want by tweaking options that restrict falls and track penalties, and there are loads of different classes to race in from 250cc to 1000-plus cc monsters.

It's a bike fan's wet dream, but for non-bikers the lack of sparkle in the graphics and overall po-faced presentation might leave you wanting a more gamer-oriented racer. A solid biking sim then, but bike fans will get much more from it than anyone else. ✷

CVG VERDICT

Deadly serious bike racing that's as complete as you could ask for, but lacking the magic sparkle of rivals such as the MotoGP games. Bike heads will love it.

OVERALL SCORE 71

HOW IT COMPARES
- MOTO GP 2
- RIDING SPIRITS II
- MOTO GP 3

RELEASE DATE
NOW

GAME INFO
COST: £39.99
PLAYERS: 1

CONTACT INFO
- PUB: GATHERING
- DEV: ILLUSION SOFTWORKS
- WWW.MAFIA-GAME.COM
- CONTACT: 01753 496600

XBOX

MAFIA

Shoot people and drink contraband to a jazz soundtrack

Tony regretted eating the out-of-date bolognaise once the stomach cramps kicked in

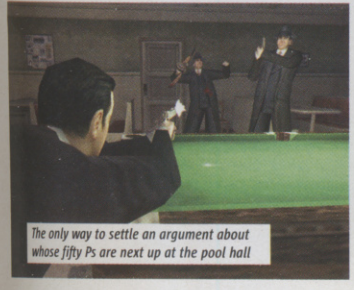
Like the razor sharp blades of a downed helicopter smashing through the CVG office in a shower of masonry and splintered wood – slicing us staffers clean across the belly in a spray of sticky innards – Mafia on Xbox has us split down the middle.

We all acknowledge it's flawed. But half of us reckon it's a triumph of style and cinematic presentation, recreating the feel of gangster movies such as GoodFellas or The Godfather, but with you slap-bang in the middle of the action. Others reckon it's a pale imitation of GTA and The Getaway that forces you to stick to the plot like glue in linear and mostly dull missions.

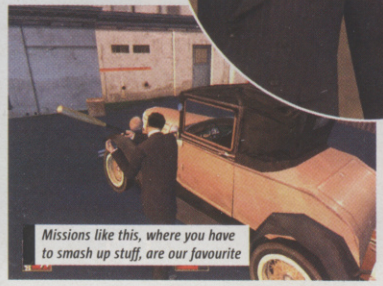
Which camp you fall into will most likely depend on how much of a GTA nut you are. It is intensely frustrating not being able to leave your vehicle and rampage around town. The strong story does make up for this though, but it takes a while for the action to kick off properly. The port to Xbox is weak too, with massive loading breaks between sections of the city and some wobbly frame rate issues.

Still, Mafia is enjoyable enough to make a good top-up buy if you've scored 100% in both GTA games and can't wait for Driv3r to hit the shelves. ✷

They'll make you an offer you can't refuse



The only way to settle an argument about whose fifty Ps are next up at the pool hall



Missions like this, where you have to smash up stuff, are our favourite

CVG VERDICT

The driving can be dull and the restrictive action won't be for everyone, but there is still a lot of fun on offer here. But don't expect a GTA-beater...

OVERALL SCORE 71

HOW IT COMPARES
- GTA DOUBLE PACK
- MAFIA
- GETAWAY

IMPORT REVIEWS

FULLY INDEPENDENT & MULTIFORMAT ✶ TRUST NO ONE ELSE

PURE GAMEPLAY, PURE JOY

Capcom is preparing to release Street Fighter III: Third Strike on PS2 for online play, there's a new online version of Guilty Gear due for Xbox, and a Live version of SVC Chaos is in the works. 2D fighters are back in vogue, friends, and I wanted you to be among the first to know.

Not only 2D fighters, but 2D adventures! Legend Of Zelda: Four Swords prevented me from disconnecting my GameCube from the TV last weekend. But despite my love of all things 2D at the moment, I'm getting itchy fingers for the next generation of machines from the Big Three. Even games as impressive as Stand Alone Complex from Sony are starting to look old and their gameplay is fairly predictable. In fact, I'm seeing through the gloss more and more, knowing for sure that a great game is all about the mechanics and really should never just be about flashy SFX or a repetitive central theme.

You might think that the King Of Fighters series is the last thing you'd want to play with your mates, but you have my word these games are total genius. Real class acts. If you don't agree, write and tell me why!

Paul Davies

Paul Davies *The Import King*

PS2

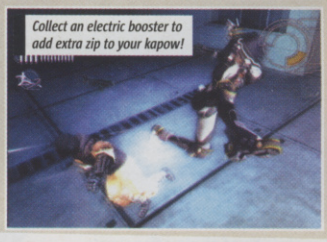
RELEASE DATE
OUT NOW

GAME INFO
IMPORT COST: £55
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONTACT INFO
PUB: SCEE ✶ DEV: CAVIA
WWW.PLAYSTATION.JP/SCEJ/TITLE/KOKAKU-S/

High-kicking Kusanagi-samma gets us all hot and steamy under the control pad

If you suffer from vertigo, don't look too long and hard at this screenshot



Collect an electric booster to add extra zip to your kapow!

GHOST IN THE SHELL STAND ALONE COMPLEX

THE ORIGINAL KICK-ASS CYBER CHICK SHOWS TRINITY HOW IT'S DONE

A sci-fi action adventure from Sony, featuring sexy special ops robot assassin – Major Kusanagi – and her hunky team-mate, Batou. You may already know of the Ghost In The Shell movie, but Stand Alone Complex is the name of the TV series, aired in Japan last year.

Gameplay alternates between Major Kusanagi and Batou as they undertake missions requiring lots of fighting and shooting; plenty of tricky navigation around buildings, and some cool manipulating of machines and mechanised men.

A MAJOR PIECE OF WORK

By the looks of things, Sony invested a lot of money but not enough time in developing Stand Alone Complex. The licence is too big to blow it completely, so the talented Cavia team (mostly ex-Namco) was enlisted to bring Kusanagi and co to life.

PREVIOUS GAMES
- Drag-On Dragoon, Ridge Racer Series, Mr Driller

HARD FACTS
- Two main playable characters
- 18 different missions
- Over 20 combat moves

DID YOU KNOW?
- Major Kusanagi gets naked in Ghost In The Shell, the movie. Worth seeing, no?

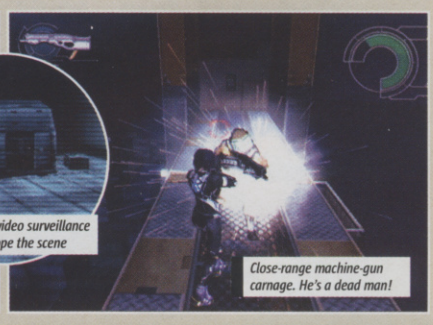
SAC is mostly enjoyable, with the TV show's sci-fi concepts neatly worked into the game. Kusanagi and Batou can hook into the computer-controlled minds of enemy soldiers to gain access to door-panel codes, or to take control of another enemy's mind and body. Some of the coolest moments in the game are when you get to gun down your compadres under Kusanagi's direction. Everything looks faithful to the TV series, and compares well to the best-looking PS2 games around.

It's when you get down to the details that SAC starts to fail. Kusanagi and Batou have an impressive range of moves; back-flipping or rolling, jump-kicking or gut-punching their foes when they're not pumping them full of high-calibre rounds. Fighting is fun, and noisy as it should be. Thing is, you quickly tire of the bullet time slow-mo effects that accompany every finishing blow. Enemies aren't too smart either – even the bosses have obvious weak spots and practically beg to be killed.

More delicate operations are often difficult and annoying – landing a jump, springing between walls, or clambering over ledges feels awkward and leads to more mishap than it ought to. You'll be mostly happy battling through SAC with all its clever lock-and-key conundrums, but always wishing Cavia had more time to add the final polish. ✶

Batou is hard as nails, but is still wise to keep low when stalking cyber bad guys

Jack into the video surveillance camera to scope the scene

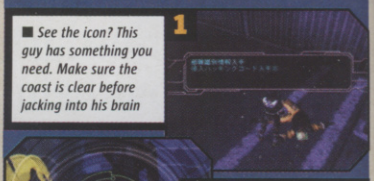


Close-range machine-gun carnage. He's a dead man!

IN MY HEAD SON

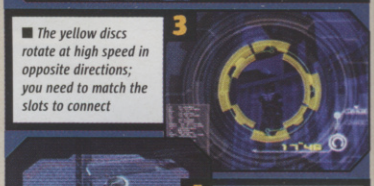
The triangular icon that appears over corpses indicates that you can jack into their minds.

Quite often it is the frequency for guards accessing minds on a network. To jack in yourself, you'll need to pass a test of reflexes first.

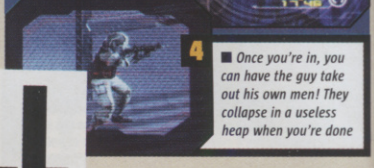


1 ■ See the icon? This guy has something you need. Make sure the coast is clear before jacking into his brain

2 ■ Choose your target in the field, then attempt to lock on and infiltrate their head. This sniper should do...



3 ■ The yellow discs rotate at high speed in opposite directions; you need to match the slots to connect



4 ■ Once you're in, you can have the guy take out his own men! They collapse in a useless heap when you're done

PAUL

CVG VERDICT

GRAPHICS 87
Cool, occasionally awkward-looking heroes. The cut-scenes are all excellent, though

SOUND 80
Explosions boom, motors whirr, and automatic doors swish as you'd like them to

GAMEPLAY 72
We wish more time had been spent perfecting the control, because it's a bit lame

LASTING APPEAL 60
You won't play the one-player mission more than twice. Four-player is a flimsy gesture

Expertly produced with enough sheen in all the right places to make it worth your while, but still flawed enough to be a bit disappointing.

OVERALL SCORE 71

HOW IT COMPARES
MGS: SUBSTANCE
STAND ALONE COMPLEX
EVERYTHING OR NOTHING

LANGUAGE BARRIER: Although you'll miss out on the plot details, it isn't too hard to figure out the controls or what is required of you in any situation.

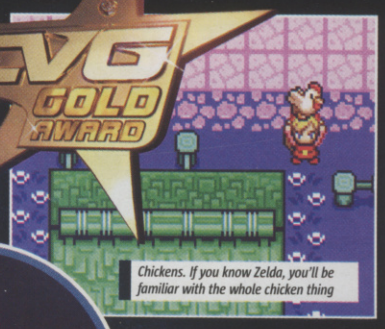
✶ GAMES SUPPLIED BY THE VIDEOGAME CENTRE TEL: 01202 527 314 URL: WWW.VIDEOGAMECENTRE.CO.UK

RELEASE DATE OUT NOW

GAME INFO IMPORT COST: £55 PLAYERS: 1-4

CONTACT INFO
- PUB: NINTENDO
- DEV: NINTENDO
- WWW.NINTENDO.CO.JP/NGC/G4SJ/INDEX.HTML

CVG GOLD AWARD



TV
テレビに注目!
LOOK WHAT'S ON TELLY!
If you see this on your GBA, you know that your eyes should be on the TV – not the GBA you dumb-ass!

"THE 2D STYLE DOESN'T DETRACT FROM THE SMART IDEAS IN THE GAME"

LEGEND OF ZELDA FOUR SWORDS

WORTH ITS WAIT IN MEDALLIONS

While GameCube may not be leading in popularity, this squad-based Zelda proves Nintendo still has what it takes to keep its followers.

So it's in 2D. Get over it. The 2D style doesn't detract from the smart ideas behind the game, plus it looks terrific, with GC effects keeping things beautiful.

ADVANCE TROOPS!

You'll need at least one Game Boy Advance to get the most from Four Swords. The Japanese version comes boxed with a GBA/GC cable, to make things easier. Hyrule Adventure, the main game on the disc, is much more fun using GBA as the controller – although you can choose the standard GC controller. For the additional modes, Shadow Battle and Navi Trackers, a GBA is essential.

Crack the nasty big chicken with the mighty little hammer, dude!

Hyrule Adventure is similar, though far from identical to Four Swords on GBA. For one thing it can be played solo, with a clever command system to manipulate the other three characters. Like all classic Nintendo games, the gameplay feels alien and a little silly at first, but soon after questioning its style your mind grips the answer.

Basically this is a full-blown Zelda epic, with the squad theme to make it tasty. Barely five minutes into the game you are taught how to arrange your guys into four types of formation – on GC this is done using the yellow C stick, on GBA you tap the L trigger to select from a menu. Individual 'Links' can be selected for positioning outside of a group.

Teamwork will be required to use the lily pads to cross the river

THE MISSING LINK

Very soon you'll be pulling giant switches, heaving hefty boulders, and triggering complex switch arrangements without a second thought. Your only concern, as ever, will be figuring out the puzzles. Choosing battle formations is another fun element – form a line to strafe attack a horde of bats, or a diamond to spin attack through a pack of guards. Boss battles require that little bit of extra strategy too.

You can appreciate that such a cool idea is enriched when the other guys on your squad are your friends sitting in the same room. You're sure to wind up yelling at each other at some point as we did, but there's no doubt that this is a great new Zelda experience through and through.

PREVIOUS GAMES
- Ocarina Of Time, The Wind Waker, Four Swords (GBA)

HARD FACTS
- Four players can be on screen at once
- Seven princesses to free!

DID YOU KNOW?
- A full-blown sequel to The Wind Waker will be unveiled next month at E3, and CVG will be there to report back!

CVG VERDICT

GRAPHICS 92
Okay so it's 2D, but you'll love cute and colourful Hyrule and the SFX are dazzling

SOUND 78
Nothing outstanding. But you get the great Zelda theme playing, and that's a bonus

GAMEPLAY 93
The solo option is a bit lame, but the four-player option is completely addictive

LASTING APPEAL 88
There are better multiplayer games, but Four Swords is always going to be worth a go

Imaginative and brilliant – exactly as every Legend Of Zelda game should be. The GBA-connectivity angle just makes things even more magical.

OVERALL SCORE 92

HOW IT COMPARES
- FOUR SWORDS (GBA)
- FOUR SWORDS (GC)
- THE WIND WAKER

LANGUAGE BARRIER: You can muddle your way through Hyrule Adventure, but you'll struggle a bit with Shadow Battle and Navi Trackers.

NO GBA, NO PLAY

Two more games are on the Four Swords disc: Shadow Battle, and Navi Trackers.

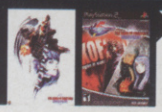
Shadow Battle reminded us of Gauntlet in that you're competing for treasure and in some cases required to work together. Navi Trackers, meanwhile, is a treasure hunt led by Tetra the pirate. Unless you know Japanese you'll be lost at sea with this one – it looks like fun, but we couldn't get very far in it.

Shadow Battle is frantic and fun – the kind of game your stupidest mate can just about handle

Tingle makes a guest appearance, challenging you to collect more treasure than him

All four players here are hiding inside their GBAs. Playing with chickens. Don't ask...

GAMES SUPPLIED BY THE VIDEOGAME CENTRE TEL: 01202 527 314 URL: WWW.VIDEOGAMECENTRE.CO.UK



RELEASE DATE: NOW (US)

GAME INFO: IMPORT COST: £55 PLAYERS: 1-2

CONTACT INFO: PUB: SNK NEOGEO DEV: SNK PLAYMORE WWW.SNKNEOGEOUSA.COM

THE KING OF FIGHTERS 2000/2001

The good, the bad, the ugly – it's got the lot

Loads of people have a problem with the backdrops on KOF2000 but we love 'em

Why would SNK/Playmore choose 2004 to release a couple of old 2D fighting games for PS2? Why, it's The King Of Fighters 10th anniversary, of course – surely some celebrations are in order!

A version of KOF has been on the CVG playlist every year since 1994. Back then it was ahead of its time, almost too heavy to stomach for guys weaned on a Capcom diet. The King Of Fighters has grown from strength to strength every year, holding its own against visually more impressive games running on technically superior hardware; flying the 2D flag when the fuss has been all about 3D.

Everyone has their favourite KOF, some are more passionate about it than others, but we dare say there has never been a bad KOF. We'll even dare to say that each and every KOF is mostly the mutt's nuts.

Interestingly, SNK has bundled two of the series' most controversial (at least with hardcore SNK fans) chapters. Both 2000 and 2001 happened around the time of SNK's closure, and the takeover by Playmore. 2000 became the SNK studio's last ever KOF, with a new developer Eolith taking over the reigns for Playmore. Not only is the artwork style radically changed for 2001, the gameplay was revamped in ways that have been celebrated but mostly seen as too horrible to contemplate. It's rare to find a fan of both, and what's worse the two sides won't even talk about it – no way!

Well, the whole 2000 versus 2001 issue could all be settled, now that we can sample both games for the price of one full-price game. Even if you already own an expensive Neo Geo ROM of either version, the PS2 editions come packed with extra characters and enhanced backgrounds, to make them collectible at the very least. The big downer is that both games have some animation censored (no bouncing boobies), and no blood. ✷

PREVIOUS GAMES
- King Of Fighters 94 to 99, Art Of Fighting, Fatal Fury, Samurai Spirits

HARD FACTS
- 35 playable fighters
- Teams of three plus strikers
- Four gameplay modes
- Eighth in the series

DID YOU KNOW?
- Even in the arcades the US versions of KOF have always been censored, so it's not just for PS2. What a load of arse!

Kula: a secret character in the arcade but a regular on PS2

KING OF FIGHTERS 2000

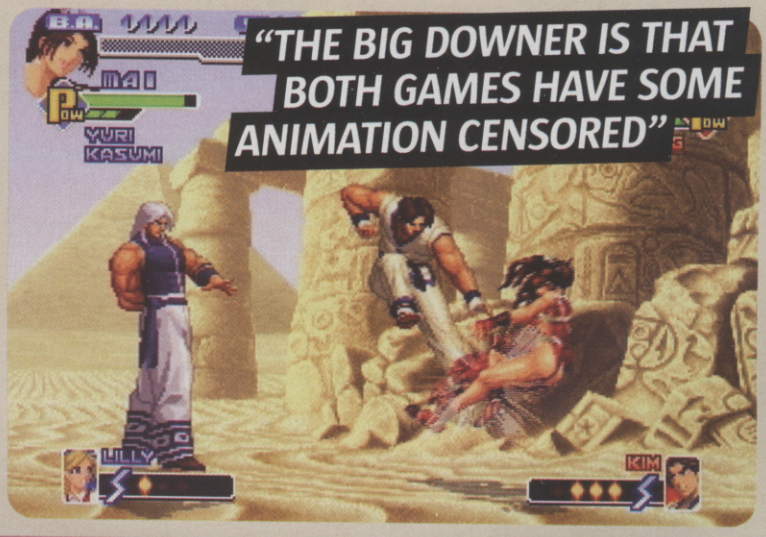
The original KOF 2000 initially disappointed 'cos the backdrops were bland, but PS2's version boasts unlockable stages from earlier KOFs.

Six new characters and radical gameplay. Central to it all is the Active Striker System, with its infinite range of combos working to a tag team principle. KOF 2000 gets criticism for pandering to the mainstream, but if you wanna go combo crazy, this is where it's at!

1 ■ The aquarium, probably one of the least favourite backgrounds, according to die-hard fans

2 ■ Vanessa was introduced in KOF 2000 but her cool boxing moves are no match for Benimaru's kicks

3 ■ Max super moves are the most powerful in the game and create a radioactive glow



KING OF FIGHTERS 2001

It's fashionable to hate KOF 2001, but not us. SNK goes all out to impress with on PS2 – new polygon backgrounds, extra characters, funked up menus.

It has the worst (ie most) number of infinite combos in the history of fighters. Expert players tag-team combo you into oblivion, making it a farce. The simple solution, of course, is to rule out such 'illegal' combos. Give KOF 2001 some time, and you'll love it!

■ The race circuit in Brazil shows cars crashing on the road below!

■ This splendid misty effect wasn't in evidence on the original Neo Geo

■ K9999 (left) is modelled after the character Tetsuo from Akira

PAUL

CVG VERDICT

GRAPHICS 77
Both are 2D with spruced up backgrounds, but the characters and animations rock

SOUND 78
Some will hate 2001's techno beats, but voice acting and impact noises are great in both

GAMEPLAY 89
Depends if you love the tag-combo school of KOF or not. Give it a chance!

LASTING APPEAL 88
Ban the evil ultimate combos from 2001, and you'll have two infinitely playable games

We'd love to score them higher but we guess these games are kinda retro, plus the censorship means you don't get 100% of the experience

OVERALL SCORE 81

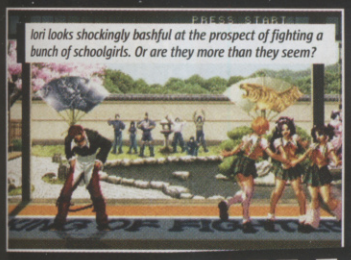
HOW IT COMPARES
- SF HYPER EDITION
- KOF 2000/2001
- KOF 2002

✷ GAMES SUPPLIED BY THE VIDEOGAME CENTRE TEL: 01202 527 314 URL: WWW.VIDEOGAMECENTRE.CO.UK

RELEASE DATE NOW (JP)

GAME INFO IMPORT COST: £55 PLAYERS: 1-2

CONTACT INFO
- PUB: SNK
- DEV: SNK PLAYMORE
- WWW.SNKPLAYMORE.CO.JP



Iori looks shockingly bashful at the prospect of fighting a bunch of schoolgirls. Or are they more than they seem?

Angel, surely the rudest fighting female around

CVG GOLD AWARD

THE KING OF FIGHTERS 2002

Arguably the finest KOF ever made, if not the finest 2D fighter – period

Forget a story, relationships between characters. When it comes down to it, all we want to know is who is the best King Of Fighters. Answer below.

If you only own one 2D fighter for PS2, this should be it. When you're competing at the highest level, the most important element of any fighting game is balance. KOF 2002 features a hefty 41 playable characters, five are new to the PS2 version, and the power-speed-technique ratio is almost miraculously perfect across the board.

You won't find one character with an unfair advantage, winning is all down to skill. The reason we have so many to choose from is because KOF 2002 is dubbed Dream Match.This is the cream of the crop from eight years of SNK fighters, drawing from Art Of Fighting, Fatal Fury, and every KOF since 1994.

In keeping with the Dream Match theme, the backdrops in KOF 2002 are rammed with tributes to past and present SNK fighters. The PS2 version even lets you to select redrawn polygon versions of all the backdrops, although they lack the style of the 2D originals. At least SNK made more of an effort with this than SVC Chaos, which was quite the rush-job conversion.

Terry Bogard just loves throwing his hat in the ring. 'Ave it!

It has also returned to the previous most popular system used in KOF 98 (also a Dream Match and still held above 2002 due to nostalgia as much as anything else), losing the Striker system and returning to a classic teams of three-versus-three.

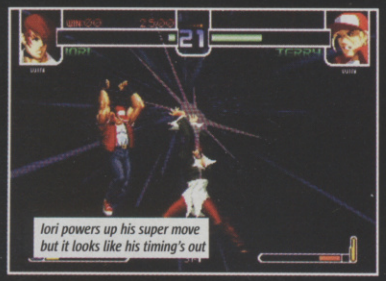
All the radical gameplay concepts from previous years have been distilled for a straight-down-to-business, let's-see-who's-boss instalment that for now is seen by the best of the best, as the best of the best. And you can't say fairer than that.

MISS ME?

When the arcade version of KOF 2002 was released, fans were miserable at the omission of a few key characters.

With the home versions, SNK has kindly reinstated the most-requested names, among them Shingo and King. So, the PS2 version really is the ultimate, ultimate 2D fighter after all.

KOF2002 is every bit as much a Dream Match as KOF 98 was - both games feature the best of SNK's best



Iori powers up his super move but it looks like his timing's out

PAUL

CVG VERDICT

If you consider yourself in any way to be a fighting game aficionado (and yes, we do but in a quiet way), KOF 2002 must be in your collection. Make sure it is!

OVERALL SCORE 94

HOW IT COMPARES
- SF HYPER EDITION
- KOF 20002
- KOF 2000/2001

OVERSEAS CONSOLE RELEASE SCHEDULE

AMERICAN RELEASE DATES

PLAYSTATION 2

DATE	GAME	PUBLISHER
3.5	Digimon Rumble Arena 2	Bandai
	Digimon World 4	Bandai
	Shrek 2	Activision
	The Mummy	Hip Interactive
4.5	ESPN Major League Baseball	SEGA
	Future Tactics: The Uprising	Crave Entertainment
	La Pucelle: Tactics	Mastiff S
	Strike Force Bowling	Crave Entertainment
	Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain	Sony
6.5	Samurai Warriors	KOEI
	Van Helsing	Universal
11.5	Transformers	Atari
18.5	Bujingai: The Forsaken City	BAM! Entertainment
1.6	DRIV3R	Atari
	Front Mission 4	Square Enix
	MTV Music Generator 3: This Is The Remix	Codemasters
	Malice Mud Duck Platformer	
	Powerdrome Mud Duck Racing	
2.6	Harry Potter And The Prisoner Of Azkaban	Electronic Arts
7.6	Shell Shock: Nam '67	Eidos Interactive
8.6	Smash Court Tennis Pro Tournament 2	Namco
15.6	Carmen Sandiego: The Secret Of The Stolen Drums	BAM! Entertainment
	Daredevil: The Man Without Fear	Encore Software
	MLB SlugFest: Loaded	Midway
	McFarlane's Evil Prophecy	Konami
	WarChess	XS Games
17.6	Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway
22.6	Astro Boy	SEGA
	Mega Man Anniversary Collection	Capcom
	SHOWDOWN: Legends of Wrestling	Acclaim
28.6	Spider-Man 2	Activision
29.6	Galactic Wrestling: Featuring Ultimate Muscle	Bandai
	Karaoke Revolution Vol. 2	Konami

XBOX

DATE	GAME	PUBLISHER
6.5	Van Helsing	Vivendi Universal
17.5	Daredevil: The Man Without Fear	Encore Software
20.5	FILA World Tour Tennis	Xicat Interactive
25.5	Carmen Sandiego: The Secret of the Stolen Drums	BAM!
	IndyCar Series 2005	Codemasters
	Metal Slug 3	SNK NeoGeo
	DRIV3R	Atari
	DroneZ	Metro 3D
	Full Spectrum Warrior	THQ
	Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	Electronic Arts
	MLB SlugFest: Loaded	Midway
	MTV Music Generator 3: This Is the Remix	Codemasters
	Malice Mud Duck Action	
	Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway
	Puyo Pop Fever	SEGA
	Room Zoom	Jaleco Entertainment
	SHOWDOWN: Legends Of Wrestling	Acclaim
	Shadow Ops: Red Mercury	Atari
	Shell Shock: Nam '67	Eidos Interactive
	Silent Hill 4: The Room	Konami
	StarCraft: Ghost	Blizzard
	Sudeki	Microsoft
	TNN Motorsports Hardcore 4x4	XS Games
	The Chronicles Of Riddick	Vivendi Universal
	The Fast And The Furious	Universal Interactive
	Thief: Deadly Shadows	Eidos Interactive

GAMECUBE

DATE	GAME	PUBLISHER
10.5	Custom Robo Battle Revolution	Nintendo
25.5	Carmen Sandiego: The Secret Of The Stolen Drums	BAM! Entertainment
2.6	Harry Potter And The Prisoner Of Azkaban	Electronic Arts
7.6	The Legend Of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures	Nintendo
8.6	Room Zoom Jaleco	Entertainment
10.6	Puyo Pop Fever	SEGA
15.6	Mega Man X: Command Mission	Capcom
	Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3	Ubisoft
22.6	Mega Man Anniversary Collection	Capcom
29.6	Spider-Man 2	Activision

GAME BOY ADVANCE

DATE	GAME	PUBLISHER
18.5	Sabre Wulf	THQ
20.5	Van Helsing	Vivendi Universal
24.5	Mario vs. Donkey Kong	Nintendo
30.5	Crash Bandicoot Purple: Ripto's Rampage	Vivendi Universal
30.5	Dragon Ball Z: Supersonic Warriors	Atari
30.5	Spyro Orange: The Cortex Conspiracy	Vivendi Universal
30.5	World Reborn	Destination Software, Inc.
31.5	River City Ransom EX	Atlus Software
1.6	Duel Masters: Sempai Legends	Atari
2.6	Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	Electronic Arts
7.6	Bomberman (Classic NES Series)	Nintendo Action
	Excitebike (Classic NES Series)	Nintendo Action
	Ice Climber (Classic NES Series)	Nintendo Action
	Legend of Zelda (Classic NES Series)	Nintendo Action
	Mega Man Battle Network 4: Blue Moon	Capcom
	Mega Man Battle Network 4: Red Sun	Capcom
	Pac-Man (Classic NES Series)	Nintendo Action
	Super Mario Bros. (Classic NES Series)	Nintendo Action
	Xevious (Classic NES Series)	Nintendo Action
16.6	Sitting Ducks	Hip Interactive
28.6	Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo
30.6	Hardcore Pool	Telegames
	Sonic Advance 3	SEGA

JAPANESE RELEASE DATES

PLAYSTATION 2

DATE	GAME	PUBLISHER
6.5	Online Pro Wrestling	Yukes
13.5	Black Matrix 00	NEC
20.5	Ultraman	Bandai
	Curry House CoCo	Dorasu
	Winning Post 6 MAXIMUM 2004	Koei
24.5	SEGA AGES Vol. 12 Puyo Puyo	Sega
27.5	Densha De GO! FINAL	Taito
	Espgaluda	Arika
	Super Robot Great Battle MX	Banpresto
	Football Kingdom Trial Edition	Namco
	Iris no Atelie Eternal Manor	Gust
	Lost Aya Sophia	Idea Factory
	WRC3	Spike
	Bloody Roar 4	Hudson
	SEGA AGES Vol.13	Outrun
	Vib Ripple (Vib Ribbon 2)	SCEE
3.6	Spawn: Chain of Destiny	Namco
10.6	Sakura Hill Fire Fighters	Irem
17.6	Twelve Kingdoms	Konami
	Silent Hill 4: The Room	Konami
24.6	Xenosaga Episode II	Namco
	Samurai Spirits Zero	
	J. League Pro Soccer: Let's Make A Club! 04	Sega

XBOX

DATE	GAME	PUBLISHER
20.5	Crimson Skies: High Road To Revenge	Microsoft
27.5	Tenchu 3	From Software
24.6	Metal Slug 3	SNK Playmore
2004	SVC Chaos	SNK Playmore
	Phantom Dust	Microsoft
	Kameo	Microsoft
	Halo 2	Microsoft
	Dead Or Alive Online	
	Jade Empire	Microsoft
	Dynamite Dekka	Sega
	Spikeout Extreme	Sega
	True Fantasy Live Online	Sega

GAMECUBE

DATE	GAME	PUBLISHER
27.5	Wario World	Nintendo
	GBA	
13.5	Gundam SEED	Bandai

LOOK OUT NEXT MONTH! US IMPORT BONANZA

A few of us will be flying to LA next month for E3, so expect us to return armed with US games. But probably not Shrek 2... although we can't rule out the possibility that this game will, er, rock. Or suck.

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Big 50!

Only the best and biggest games make it into our Big 50. Don't fancy any of this month's reviews? One of these'll please you – guaranteed!

FAR CRY 91%

■ PC ■ Ubisoft ■ £34.99

The first-person shooter equivalent of a back-packer holiday... with Johnny Rotten. Freedom to wander where you want, when you want across lush tropical islands and diving into beautiful blue seas – only instead dodging crazed out hippies trying to flog you dope, this has you ducking fire from merciless mercs and mad mutants hell-bent on blasting head-sized holes in your hapless hide.

007 EVERYTHING OR NOTHING 83%

■ PS2, Xbox, GameCube ■ EA ■ £39.99

EA must love pain, 'cos every year it does a Bond game and every year someone disses it for not being as good as GoldenEye. Same this year, only it really isn't that far off. No, honestly.

ADVANCE WARS 2: BLACK HOLE RISING 91%

■ GBA ■ Nintendo ■ £29.99

Proof that strategy games aren't for speccy twats called DarthMaul897364. Advance Wars 2 is addictive, challenging and... uh-oh, the F word... fun!

BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM 88%

■ PC ■ EA ■ £29.99

It's 1942 shoved through EA's update sausage factory, but packing more Vietnam War movie moments than a Huey doorgunner has ammo.

BURNOUT 2: POINT OF IMPACT 91%

■ PS2, Xbox, GameCube ■ Acclaim ■ £19.99 - 39.99

For people that love driving VERY FAST, this is a gift from the gods. No-frills, balls-out, unadulterated arcade racing with wicked pile-ups. Still ace a year on.

CASTLEVANIA 85%

■ PS2 ■ Konami ■ £39.99

Fangtastic and faithful recreation of all that's great about the series, from the exploration and puzzle-solving to spot-on combat.

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 03-04 84%

■ PC ■ Eidos ■ £29.99

With less bugs and updated player stats, say goodbye both to soap and the real world, and embrace the crack-like phenomenon that is Champ Man. Ugly as a Southgate/Rooney lovechild, mind.

CIVILIZATION III 90%

■ PC ■ Atari ■ £9.99 (Conquest add-on £19.99)

Better than history lessons taught by a page 3 girl, re-write history as it should've been – with YOU in charge. Strategy-wise, it's as deep as it gets.

DANCE STAGE MEGAMIX/UNLEASHED 76%

■ PS2, Xbox ■ Konami ■ £29.99/£39.99

Plug in a dance mat and shake your booty – or cringe as your nan wobbles her chicken-wings. Groovier than titty-poppin' Justin Timberlake, a fave when friends and family are round.

FINAL FANTASY X 88%

■ PS2 ■ Sony ■ £19.99

The first FF for PS2 was a Choco-fanciers wet-dream. Massive and absorbing, the purer levelling up and skills system kicks over-drives up X-2's ass.

F-ZERO GX 91%

■ GameCube ■ Nintendo ■ £39.99

Frantically fast futuristic racer that proves Cube packs some processing punch. It won't make that carry-handle look any less stupid though.

GRAND THEFT AUTO DOUBLE PACK 95%

■ PS2, XBOX ■ Rockstar ■ £39.99

Two classics for the price of one, GTA lets you loose in a concrete jungle where anything goes, so long as it's on the wrong side of the law. Slick!

GRAN TURISMO 3: A-SPEC 93%

■ PS2 ■ Sony ■ £19.99

Want a garage full of classic cars but can't be arsed to work for a living or even go steal them all? Dust this one off in preparation for GT4 instead.

HALO 95%

■ Xbox, PC ■ Microsoft ■ £19.99

Sci-fi shooter that sold the system, two years on and many console shooters are still struggling to come up to par. Worth owning an Xbox just to play.

LEGACY OF KAIN: SOUL REAVER 2 78%

■ PS2, Xbox ■ Eidos ■ £19.99

Does everything a platformer does but it's dark, rich gameworld makes you feel there's much more to it – which there is, like real-time morphing environments! Best of the series by far.

MANHUNT 72%

■ PS2 ■ Rockstar ■ £39.99

The current king of controversy, it starts out all stealth and edgy violence but ends up as a case of style over substance. While it lasts, you'll be killing your hunters with sadistic glee.

MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!! 86%

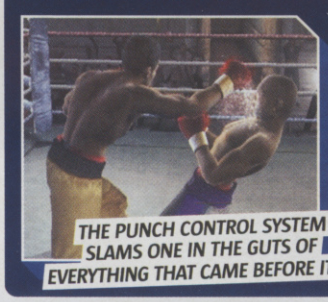
■ GameCube ■ Nintendo ■ £39.99

Closer to the N64 than the beloved SNES version, DD tries to be a crowd-pleaser but some players hate its kiddier karts and stretched-out tracks.

FIGHT NIGHT 2004 89%

■ Xbox, PS2 ■ EA ■ £39.99

Total Punch Control. Memorise those words, 'cos sports fans are going to be talking about it a fair bit this year. We've come to expect high production values, big licensed names and thumping choons from EA Sports titles, but punching with the analog stick works so well you'll wonder what other games could use a similar control overhaul. Class!



NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND 91%

■ PS2, Xbox, GC, PC ■ EA ■ £39.99

The definitive underground racer, it's no wonder it rocketed to the top of the charts at the start of the year and hung way up there like EA stuck nitro up its tailpipe. Which, actually, it did. Fantastic illicit street racing atmosphere, cracking customisation options, cool licensed cars and intense racing action, this new tack for EA's NFS series is totally on the money – and you know a sequel is more certain than donuts on the tarmac in a council car-park.

MARIO SUNSHINE 92%

■ GameCube ■ Nintendo ■ £19.99

Reinvented platform action thanks to the Ron Jeremy look-alike's new backpack. More magical moments than David Blaine's shazam hands.

MAX PAYNE 2: FALL OF MAX PAYNE 84%

■ PC, PS2, Xbox ■ Rockstar ■ £34.99

Yet more hard-nosed, stylish shooting shenanighans with Bullet Time and amnesia as Max scores again. PC and Xbox versions are let down by slow frame rates and long loading on PS2.

MAX PAYNE 89%

■ GBA ■ Rockstar ■ £29.99

Handheld remake shoes in much that made Max's first crim-capping caper so classy, from the John Woo slo-mo gunning and noir narrative to the blood and gore.

METROID PRIME 93%

■ GameCube ■ Nintendo ■ £19.99

Classic platformer melded with first-person shooter into a totally unique-feeling actioner that's perfectly paced, heavily atmsopheric and hard!

METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SUBSTANCE 81%

■ PS2, Xbox, PC ■ Konami ■ £39.99

Sons Of Liberty gets a remix. Now with more Snake and less of that albino fop. Makes you wonder why they didn't do it right the first time. Helped define the stealth genre, but the plot is quite nuts.

METAL GEAR SOLID: TWIN SNAKES 89%

■ GC ■ Konami ■ £39.99

Snake has snuffed Sons Of Liberty, stolen it's clothes and stuffed the limp corpse of its plot into a foot-locker, time-warping back to his PSone classic.

POKEMON COLOSSEUM 90%

■ GC ■ Nintendo ■ £39.99

This is Stadium updated, only now you're getting two games in one – though, like before, you will need a GBA (plus copies of Ruby and Sapphire) to get the most from Colosseum. Scrap away in Battle mode as per the original, or head off on an RPG type adventure freeing Shadow Pokémon. There's less emphasis on collecting 'ickle beasts in the story mode than you'd expect, and it plays a bit like the GBA version mixed with Final Fantasy.

POKE-HOLIC HEAVEN THAT'S BETTER VALUE THAN BEFORE – NOT THAT POKE-HATERS WILL CARE

NBA STREET 2 83%

■ PS2, Xbox, GameCube ■ EA Sports ■ £39.99

Basketball goes back to the street... again. Fast, funky, full of neat tricks and fantastic commentary, Street 2 really does capture the feel of the sport perfectly.

POKEMON PINBALL RUBY/SAPPHIRE 86%

■ GBA ■ Nintendo ■ £29.99

The best pinball game ever, it's dead clever the way it combines collecting the furry critters with frantically slapping your Pokéball with your flippers. Ack ack!

POKEMON SAPPHIRE/RUBY 87%

■ GBA ■ Nintendo ■ £29.99

Catch yet more furry creatures, train them and then go to battle against fellow Pokémaniacs. It may look pants but this is pure gaming gold, honest.

PRINCE OF PERSIA: SANDS OF TIME 89%

■ PS2, Xbox, GameCube, PC ■ Ubisoft ■ £39.99

Ace platformer that likes to get all Craig David with a fancy "Can I get a rewind?" time-travel feature.Looks luverly, but a bit short and buggy too.

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3 95%

■ PS2, PC ■ Konami ■ £39.99

Best football game on the planet. What more do you want us to say? Oh yeah... no real players. Well, we've all gotta have some dreams, right?

PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2 93%

■ Xbox ■ Microsoft ■ £39.99

Street racing thrills in sumptuous looking cities with awesome Xbox Live support too. Bit of a slow-burner till you've got some cool cars.

RAINBOW SIX 3 84%

■ PS2, Xbox ■ UbiSoft ■ £39.99

Great squad-based tactical shooter that feels more realistic than other games in this arena. You'll look a twat wearing that headset to talk to people though. PS2's outing is the weakest, too.

SIM CITY 4 79%

■ PC ■ EA ■ £34.99

Make like a mayor and build the metropolis of your dreams. Just don't come running to us for help if your water pipes burst – we know a few plumbers but they're all rubbish.

SOULCALIBUR 2 88%

■ PS2, Xbox, GameCube ■ EA/Nintendo ■ £39.99

Looks great but weak AI makes one-player too easy and the fighting system just isn't deep enough to last in multiplayer. We prefer Virtua Fighter.

SSX 3 85%

■ PS2, Xbox, GameCube ■ EA ■ £39.99

The ultimate boarding thrill-ride, SSX 3 is more open-ended as you wrack up the points exploring three huge mountains looking for the phattest air.

SPLINTER CELL PANDORA TOMORROW 94%

■ Xbox, PC ■ Ubisoft ■ £39.99

Sam slaps on his night-perving goggles and pokes his optic cable into loads more crevices in this stealth sequel masterpiece. Genius multiplayer.

STAR WARS: KOTOR 88%

■ Xbox, PC ■ Activision ■ £39.99

Star Wars gets a AAA game, with cool weapons and skills plus a genius fighting system. More fun than waxing a wookie – but just as beardy.

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2004 89%

■ PS2, Xbox, GameCube, PC ■ EA Sports ■ £39.99

Someone should have told Siegfried and Roy that there are easier ways to tame a tiger. This is the Gran Turismo of golf games – it's that good!

TRANSFORMERS 88%

■ PS2 ■ Atari ■ £39.99

Intense first- and third-person blaster action set in huge tasty-looking levels, with your choice of bot and load-out adding a little tactical depth. Proving how the right treatment can drag old licences up-to-date and in style.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO GIVE A TOSS ABOUT TRANSFORMERS TO ENJOY THIS MECH-MASHER

TIMESPLITTERS 2 91%

■ PS2, Xbox, GameCube ■ Eidos ■ £19.99

Comedy time-travelling shooter with great levels and wicked multiplayer modes. If you loved GoldenEye on N64, snap this up.

TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 79%

■ PS2, Xbox, GameCube, GBA ■ Activision ■ £39.99

The weakest game in the series, but Tony's still the chairman of the board when it comes to skating on your console. Made us wish Jackass' Bam Margera would do his own videogame.

TOP SPIN 83%

■ Xbox ■ Microsoft ■ £39.99

"Anyone that says Virtua Tennis is better cannot be serious. Wedge a racket up their ass and make them play this, that'll learn 'em real good". A direct quote from CVG's Grazza, no less.

TRUE CRIME: STREETS OF LA 77%

■ PS2, Xbox, GameCube ■ Activision ■ £39.99

If you're a fan of GTA then True Crime will have you spitting bullets out your butt at the similarities. The city itself is vast, but once again it's a case of less could've been more. Mad ending too.

VIEWTIFUL JOE 89%

■ GameCube ■ Capcom ■ £39.99

A kung-fu fighting superhero crimefighter with more Bullet Time tricks than the whole Matrix trilogy. Crazy, unique and very cool – viewtiful even!

VIRTUA FIGHTER 4 EVOLUTION 93%

■ PS2 ■ Sega ■ £39.99

Tekken 4? Parp! Virtua Fighter 4 is where the big boys play. This is the current pinnacle of 3D beat 'em ups. Just a pity Akira looks like Peter Andre.

WARIO WARE INC. 88%

■ GBA ■ Nintendo ■ £29.99

Mini-game nirvana in one of the smartest, most devious and addictive games ever. The pleasure of slicing steaks and picking noses is intense, but over too soon.

WWE SMACKDOWN! HCTP 87%

■ PS2 ■ THQ ■ £39.99

The series gets bigger and better each year and now you can play Bra and Panties matches avec the laydeez – it's the best wrestling game ever!

LEGEND OF ZELDA: LINK TO THE PAST 92%

■ GBA ■ Nintendo ■ £29.99

A blast from Nintendo's past, but now with the added Four Swords multiplayer game. A piece of magical adventuring you've got to check out.

LEGEND OF ZELDA: LINK TO THE PAST 95%

■ GameCube ■ Nintendo ■ £39.99

Absorbing graphics and captivating gameplay, mini Orlando Bloom Link will pull you in faster than Jordan's yo-yo knickers go up and down.

Do you agree with CVG? If you think there's something missing, write it and let us know.
mailbag.cvg@dennis.co.uk

NEW ENTRIES

FIGHT NIGHT 2004

CVG's office is now an orgy of fisting violence. EA's got us all furiously slapping our sticks so we can fire off stiff ones in public... and we're lovin' it!

MAX PAYNE GBA

Team CVG's doing everything in slo-mo this month. Especially Mike and his hour-long dumps – he must be playing with his pint-sized mm-Max.

TRANSFORMERS

We know a few of you wondered when we put it on the cover some months back, but forget your prejudices – this one's a real blast.

DROP-OUTS

CALL OF DUTY

Served with distinction at the top of the PC shooter charts, but Far Cry just capped its ass.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

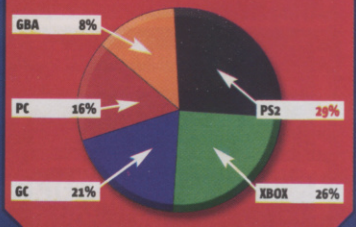
Slick looking but Battlefield Vietnam is less po-faced and our current PC multiplayer fave.

SILENT HILL 3

We love survival horror but after droolsome new screenshots, it's Resi 4 we want now!

FORMAT FACE-OFF

Which formats rule CVG's Big 50 chart this month? Here's the breakdown...



BEST AND WORST OF THE LAST 3MONTHS

Missed an issue of CVG and want to know what the reviews highlights and lowlights were? Here you go...

FAR CRY	
PC	91%
POKEMON COLOSSEUM	
GC	90%
PROJECT ZERO 2	
PS2	86%
METROID: ZERO MISSION	
GBA	84%
GLASS ROSE	
PS2	18%

SPLINTER CELL PANDORA TOMORROW	
XB, PC	94%
METAL GEAR SOLID: TWIN SNAKES	
GC	89%
RAINBOW SIX 3	
PS2	84%
FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES	
GC	68%
THIS IS FOOTBALL 2004	
PS2	36%

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004	
PC	87%
KILL.SWITCH	
PS2/XB	82%
CASTLEVANIA	
PS2	85%
007 EVERYTHING OR NOTHING	
PS2/XB/GC/GBA	83%
URBAN FREESTYLE SOCCER	
PS2/XB/GC/PC	34%

NURSE CVG'S BIG TIPS

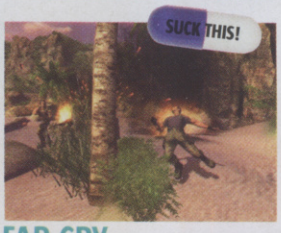
The Surgery is Open:
Get your filthy paws all over Nurse CVG's tips!

Wow. The Surgery has been stuffed full of so many cheats and hints this month I've had to do some fairly hefty tip reduction just to squeeze 'em all in. And look, they're still popping out. Go on, look at my tips!

Now go ahead and play with 'em! If you love unloading your shooter there's cracking codes for Far Cry, UT2K4 and Battlefield Vietnam, info on how to play the original Metroid and give old-school Samus a good seeing-to, some pukka passwords for TMNT that'll give you a turtle's head, and razor-sharp tips for Tenchu and Ninja Gaiden. And, yes, those little Pokémon buggers are back.

Don't say I'm not good to you. Send me your cheats or let me know if you need a hand. I can give you anything you want. You just have to ask. See you next month!

Lots of Love, Nurse CVG. xxx



FAR CRY

PC

Life's a beach, so get your own back...

Make a shortcut to the game, and edit it so that after the command path it says -DEVMODE. This unlocks all levels and these commands:

God Mode	Backspace
Change View	F1
Load saved position	F10
Spawn Point	F3
No Clipping	F4
Save current position	F9
999 ammo	O
All Weapons	P

METROID: ZERO MISSION

GBA

Slip these into Samus' password slot:

Best ending with no suit:
X— —- —N?WO dV-Gm9 W01GMI

Debug Mode:
BOMBS_ MISSLE SCREW_ ATACK_

Hard Mode:
999999 999999 KKKKKK KKKKKK

Infinite missiles and health:
NARPAS SWORD0 000000 000000

Start with Morph Ball and Bombs:
000000 000000 4G0000 00000H

Suitless Samus:
JUSTIN BAILEY / — — — — — —

Start with Suitless Samus:
000000 000020 000000 000020

Start on Norfair with Suitless Samus and infinite missles. No item upgrades:
SAMUS8 RIDLEY 444444 444444

Start at Kraid's Lair with the Long Beam, Ice Beam, Bombs, High Jump Boots, Screw Attack, Varia, Suitless Samus, and 255 Missles:
JUSTIN BAILEY ~~~~~~

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

GC, PS2, XBOX

I've had my fair share of teenagers. In the Surgery, that is. Enter these at the password screen.

PS2:

Leonardo's defence doubles:
LDSMS

Donatello's defence doubles:
MLMLS

Michelangelo's defence doubles:
RLDDR

Raphael's defence doubles:
SDRML

Leonardo's power-up doubles:
RSDMM

Donatello's power-up doubles:
MLSDS

Michelangelo's power-up doubles:
RLMSM

Raphael's power-up doubles:
RSSSR

XBOX:

Leonardo's defence doubles:
MLLSR

Donatello's defence doubles:
LLSMR

Michelangelo's defence doubles:
MRLLD

Raphael's defence doubles:
LSMDR

Leonardo's power-up doubles:
SLDDS

Donatello's power-up doubles:
SMLLR

Michelangelo's power-up doubles:
SMRDL

Raphael's power-up doubles:
LRLMS

GC:

Leonardo's defence doubles:
LDSMS

Donatello's defence doubles:
MLMLS

Michelangelo's defence doubles:
RLDDR

Raphael's defence doubles:
SDRML

Leonardo's power-up doubles:
RSDMM

Donatello's power-up doubles:
MLSDS

Michelangelo's power-up doubles:
RLMSM

Raphael's power-up doubles:
RSSSR

POKÉMON CHANNEL

PS2, XBOX

Little monsters on the box? I've had a few girls in the Surgery with something similar, nasty business.

Enter these codes at the 'Press Start' screen to unlock everything:

PS2: ●▲■△➡⬇

XBOX: B, Up, X, Y, Right, Down

NURSE CVG'S TIP OF THE MONTH

POKÉMON COLOSSEUM

GC

You'll probably have realised by now that I'm not a fan of Pokémon, but who cares what I think? I'm just the hot girl in the PVC Nurse's outfit with the top tips. You love those crazy pocket monsters, so here you go:

Unlockables:
Unlock Colosseum Level 50 Battles:
Beat the Tower Colosseum

Unlock Colosseum Level 100 Battles:
Beat the Phenac Stadium, Pyrite Colosseum, and Under Colosseum in single/double battle mode.

Trading with Pokémon Ruby/Sapphire:
Beat the Final Boss at Realgam's Colosseum.

Shadow Pokémon Locations:
You'll find the shadow Pokémon on the left in the possession of these trainers.

Pikachu	(Level 10) Silver Cupon.
Plusle	(Level 13) Get Ginsaru.
Togetic	(Level 20) False Player.
Remoraid	(Level 20) Miraabo's Underling Bress.
Espeon	(Level 25) Starter.
Umbreon	(Level 26) Starter.
Makuhita	(Level 30) Miraabo's Underling Troy.
Bayleef	(Level 30) Mysterious Combatant Verde.
Quilava	(Level 30) Mysterious Combatant Lasso.
Croconaw	(Level 30) Mysterious Combatant Bruno.
Furret	(Level 33) Rogue Mas.
Misdreavus	(Level 30) Rider Senyo.
Noctowl	(Level 30) Rider Bop.
Flaafy	(Level 30) Street Performer Chelese.
Skiploom	(Level 30) Rider Lapso
Quagsire	(Level 30) Bandana Rascal Pick.
Slugma	(Level 30) Rollerboy Toone.
Yanma	(Level 33) Shadow Combatant Wild.
Mantine	(Level 33) Miraabo's Underling Suela.
Quilfish	(Level 33) Hunter Tanka.
Medidite	(Level 33) Rider Reed.
Dunsparce	(Level 33) Rider Natula.
Swablu	(Level 33) Hunter Tolemo.
Sudowoodo	(Level 35) Shadow Leader Miraabo.
Hitmontop	(Level 38) Shadow Combatant Cowap.
Entei	(Level 40) Shadow Leader Dakeem.
Ledian	(Level 40) Shadow Combatant Colga
Suicune	(Level 40) Shadow Leader Veuns
Raikou	(Level 40) Shadow Leader Borg.
Gligar	(Level 43) Hunter Hesity.
Stantler	(Level 43) Chaser Shiner.
Piloswine	(Level 43) Vain Wees.
Sneasel	(Level 43) Rider Raru.
Aipom	(Level 43) Shadow Combatant Gaku.
Murkrow	(Level 43) Shadow Combatant Ricoss.
Forretress	(Level 43) Shadow Combatant Marle.
Ariados	(Level 43) Shadow Combatant Gabeach.
Granbull	(Level 43) Shadow Combatant Fia.
Vibrava	(Level 43) Shadow Combatant Izuna.
Smeargle	(Level 45) Team Snagem Sabu.
Ursaring	(Level 45) Team Snagem Misango.
Shuckle	(Level 45) King Zoldan.
Delibird	(Level 45) Shadow Combatant Zaile.
Sunflora	(Level 45) Shadow Combatant Jeannie.
Heracross	(Level 45) Shadow Combatant Poton.
Skarmory	(Level 47) Team Snagem Boss Hergonza.
Miltank	(Level 48) Vain Lanbee.
Absol	(Level 48) Rider E.G.
Houndoom	(Level 48) Shadow Combatant Endy.
Tropius	(Level 49) Shadow Combatant Lasty.
Metagross	(Level 50) Shadow Combatant Jyakila.
Tyranitar	(Level 55) Shadow Boss Waldak.
Hou-hou	(Level 70) Purify all of the shadow Pokémon, and beat the 100-in-a-row fight.

JUST WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED!

NINJA GAIDEN

XBOX

I've got that many ninjas climbing into every nook and cranny of my Surgery that it's amazing I can fit them all in. Anyway, here's all the cheats:

- *Spirit of the Devils:* Give Masamura 10 scarabs.
- *Armlet of Benediction:* Give 15 scarabs.
- *Dabilahro:* Give Masamura 20 scarabs.
- *Armlet of Fortune:* Give Masamura 30 scarabs.
- *Armlet of Tranquillity:* Give Masamura 40 scarabs.
- *Unlock Ninja Gaiden 1:* Give Masamura 50 scarabs.
- *Unlock Evil Ryu:* Beat the game on Very Hard difficulty
- *Unlock the Dark Dragon Blade:* Beat game on any difficulty. Replay, visiting Muramasa's shop in Chap 13.
- *Unlock Ninja Gaiden 2:* Obtain Ninja Gaiden 1, shoot the clock face in Tairon near Muramasa's shop.
- *Unlock Ninja Gaiden 3:* Go to the ceremonial room in the Aqueducts, and jump up to the place where you got the golden scarab.
- *Unlock Ninja of the Future Outfit:* Complete the game on normal mode, and then hold L at the beginning of a new game.
- *Unlock Plasma Saber:* Complete game on normal difficulty.
- *Play Ninja Gaiden 1 at main menu:* Beat the game with Ninja Gaiden 1 in your inventory.
- *Play Ninja Gaiden 2 at main menu:* Beat the game with Ninja Gaiden 2 in your inventory.
- *Play Ninja Gaiden 3 at main menu:* Beat the game with Ninja Gaiden 3 in your inventory.
- *Unlock all Music in Sound Test:* Finish the game once on Normal / Hard
- *Unlock Very Hard Mode:* Complete the game on Normal mode.

MTX: MOTOTRAX

PS2, XBOX

You can't beat a big throbbing machine between your... oh sorry, I did that last month. I do it most nights to be honest, but here's all your unlockables you lucky lot.

- *Unlock Officer Dick:* Complete Freeride Mode In Career Mode.
- *Unlock Police Bike:* Complete all Freestyle Competitions.
- *Unlock Slipknot Bike:* Complete the Master Supercross.
- *Unlock Speed Demon:* Complete the Career Mode.
- *Unlock Trickbot:* Complete Freestyle Mode In Career Mode.

RISE TO HONOUR

PS2

I always thought a Jet Li was something you had a shot on when you went to the beach in Magaluf, but turns out he's some kung-fu guy. Oh well, here's some cool stuff for you:

- *Unlock Hard Mode:* Complete the game on Normal difficulty.
- *Unlock Once Upon A Time In China and Fist of Legend Costumes:* Complete the game once on any difficulty.
- *Unlock Young Kit Yun and Young Michelle FMVs:* Complete the game once on any difficulty.

TENCHU: RETURN FROM DARKNESS

XBOX

Last month I mentioned ninjas come quietly, and in this game they come from behind. Quietly. So you can't even see them when they do come. Pause the game and enter these codes and you can too:

- *Fill Kuji* Hold the L and R Triggers and press Left, Left, Left, Right, X
- *Add 100 points to your score* Hold down the white and black buttons and press Right, Right, Right, Left.
- *Increase your damage* Hold down the R Trigger and the White Button and press Up, Down, Up, Down. Let go of the R Trigger and White Button and press X, X, X
- *Restore Health* Press Up, Down, Up, Down, X, X, X
- *Add a new special ability* Hold the Right Trigger and the Black Button and press Up, Up, Down, Down. Let go of the Right Trigger and the Black Button. Then press X, X, and then the Left Trigger.

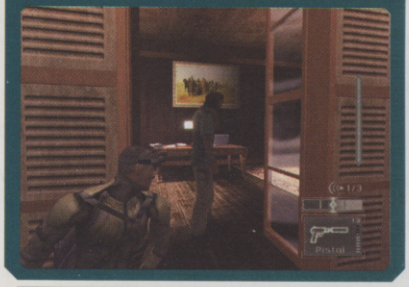
TOP 20 TIPS

TIPS FOR ALL THE BEST-SELLING GAMES!

1 TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMMOROW

PS2, XB, GC

To get the password allowing you to enter Sodono's House use the sticky-cam right up against his door. You must be in earshot to hear each of the passwords, and each will be followed by "Pandora Tomorrow". They'll be recorded onto your OPSAT.



2 007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING

PS2, GC

To unlock the Golden Gun get 1 platinum award then pause the game and press: **GC:** X, Y, A, X, Y **PS2:** ●△✕△■.

3 LMA MANAGER 2004

XBOX

Enter in your name as LMA2004A and your players will run like they've got jet engines up their nipsies.

4 FAR CRY

PC

Press ~ to access the console then type in the following codes:

give_all_weapons=1 ..... All Weapons
give_all_ammo=1 ..... Ammunition
god_mode_count=1 ..... God Mode

5 NORTON INTERNET SECURITY 2004

PC

Stop downloading porno filth to avoid trojans and viruses.

6 SONIC HEROES

GC, PS2, XBOX

Get 80 emblems to unlock the two-player Bobsled race mode.

7 METAL GEAR SOLID: THE TWIN SNAKES

GC

Beat the game while submitting to Ocelot's torture to unlock the stealth camouflage.

8 BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM

PC

To view your buddylist, type buddylist = game.buddylist into the console when you're playing.

9 UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

PC

When you get 100 adrenaline, quickly hit down, down, down, down on the keyboard to activate the regeneration combo.

10 FIFA 2004

PS2, XBOX, GC

Beat all of the teams in the Spanish Primera to unlock them in other modes.

11 SOCOM II: US NAVY SEALS

PS2, XBOX, GC

Beat the game in Lieutenant mode to unlock the Algerian Officer, Pius Platz and Vaaleska Lukanov in Online mode.

12 FINDING NEMO

XBOX, PS2, GC

At the new game screen enter this code to become invincible:
PS2: △■●●●△△■■●●●●■△●●●■●△●●■●●●△●●■●●●△.
XBOX: Y, X, X, B, B, B, Y, Y, X, X, X, B, B, B, B, X, Y, B, B, B, X, B, B, B, X, B, Y, B, X, B, B, B, Y. **GC:** Y, X, X, B, B, B, Y, Y, X, X, X, B, B, B, B, X, Y, B, B, B, X, B, Y, B, B, X, B, B, Y, B, X, B, B, B, Y, B, X, B, B, B, Y.

13 NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND

PS2, XBOX, GC

To unlock Drift Physics enter this code at the main title screen:
PS2: R1 ▲▲▲▼▼▼▼ L1. **GC:** R B, Up, Up, Down, Down, Down, L B. **XBOX:** R, Up, Up, Down, Down, Down, L.

14 THIS IS FOOTBALL 2004

PS2

Be very careful if you are going to use dives (you dirty, dirty cheat). If the referee has a good view he'll book you every time.

15 CRICKET 2004

PS2, PC

On PC press space and then type 131 to wallop the ball.

16 THE SIMPSONS HIT & RUN

PS2

To make vehicles blow up when you touch them, tap these codes in at the main menu:
GC: Y, Y, X, X. **PS2:** △△■■. **XBOX:** Y, Y, X, X.

17 COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO

PC

Remember to always take missions slowly, never rush into combat, and take cover at every opportunity otherwise you'll run straight into the enemy and be very, very dead.

18 TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX 3

XBOX

Type in this code at any time during the game to be invincible. Up, Up, Down, Down, Left, Right, Left, Right, B, A.

19 DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

PC, XBOX

In the UNATCO ruins, enter the first large room, and pick up the flag. Take it to Joseph Manderly's office, find the bathroom, stand the flag on the floor, then flush the toilet to be taken to a secret dance party level.

20 LORD OF THE RINGS: RETURN OF THE KING

PS2, XBOX, GC

Pause and hold all of the shoulder buttons/both triggers, then enter this code to give Frodo 1000 exp. **PS2:** ▲△▲▼.
XBOX: Down, Y, Up, Down. **GC:** Down, Y, Up, Down.

SHOW US YOUR TIPS!

PROOF THAT CVG READERS ARE THE HOTTEST GAMERS!

Honestly, every month I'm gagging for a good tip and you lot never fail to satisfy me.

Quenching my filthy, dirty desires for hot tippage this month are a scary double-header for fright-fests Forbidden Siren and Project Zero: Crimson Butterfly, a whole bunch of smokin' cheat codes for Rockstar's budget re-release of Midnight Club 2, some rude stuff you can shout at people in Lifeline, and for those of you with premature importation issues, I've got storming secrets for Onimusha 3. At this rate the Surgery won't even have a waiting list – but I'd still like it if you'd come along and see me. Keep sending your tips!

FORBIDDEN SIREN

PS2

I hope you appreciate these tips because I've gone through about fifty pairs of pants to get them. My bedroom smells like a bog. To unlock a nifty little Puzzle Game you have to acquire Archive 087 on Kyoya Sudo's stage, on Day 3, at 03:00. And for a hardcore Time Attack mode complete every scenario and make sure you've fulfilled both your primary and secondary objectives for all stages.

Paddy, via email

CVG Love the tip, hate the stuff about your pants.

PROJECT ZERO 2: CRIMSON BUTTERFLY

PS2

Check out this list of unlocks for Project Zero 2:

✷ *Unlock first ending*
Finish on Easy or Normal difficulty
✷ *Unlock Feel and Expand camera commands*
Complete Easy or Nomal
✷ *Unlock Mission Mode, Gallery, Ghost List*
Complete Easy or Normal
✷ *Unlock Hard Mode, two costumes, Mio's glasses:*
Complete Normal difficulty
✷ *Unlock Maid costume for Mayu*
Complete Mission Mode
✷ *Unlock two alternate costumes*
Complete every mission with an "S" ranking
✷ *Unlock Set-Up Information*
Complete Ghost List
✷ *Unlock alternate ending, Nightmare mode, Album mode, true ending, two secret costumes*
Complete Hard difficulty
✷ *Unlock alternate ending, two secret costumes*
Complete Nightmare difficulty

Justin, Norwich

CVG Feel and Expand camera commands? Might get Team CVG to use them next time they take some shots of me.

MIDNIGHT CLUB 2

PS2, XBOX

Noticed Rockstar's wicked street racer is due out on Platinum soon so thought I'd send in codes that helped me beat the game. Input them through the Cheat Code screen from the Options menu:

PS2:

✷ *howhardcanitbe(0-9)*
Value of (0-9) determines difficulty. 0 is easy, 9 is rock 'ard
✷ *Carcrobatics*
Unlocks air controls for cars
✷ *GreenLantern*
Gives you infinite nitro
✷ *Savethekids*
Unlocks machine-gun and rockets to blow opponents up!
✷ *Gladiator*
Makes your car invulnerable
✷ *TheCollector*
Unlocks every last motor
✷ *Globetrotter*
Unlocks all locations in all cities
✷ *PennyThug*
Unlocks every location, city, and car in Arcade Mode
✷ *Rimbuk*
Unlocks all in Arcade Mode
✷ *Hotwire*
Unlocks every vehicle for the Online Mode

XBOX:

✷ *Ozzysworld*
See the world through Ozzy's eyes – it's totally messed up!
✷ *howhardcanitbe(0-9)*
Value of (0-9) determines difficulty. 0 is easy, 9 is rock 'ard
✷ *howfastcanitbe(0-9)*
Value of (0-9) determines game speed. 0 is Micra, 9 is Ferrari
✷ *lovenotwar*
Unlocks machine-guns and rockets to blow stuff up with
✷ *adamantium*
Makes your car invincible
✷ *zoomzoom4*
Unlocks unlimited nitrous in Arcade mode
✷ *bigbrother*
Unlocks an extra statistic in your profile
✷ *greasemonkey*
Unlocks all driving abilities for motors
✷ *hotwired*
Unlocks all cars in Arcade Mode
✷ *theworldismine*
Unlocks every city and location

Al, Bromwich

CVG You still get loads of fun from Midnight Club 2 even though it's cheap. Like me!

COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO

PC

Finally got a copy of Condition Zero after the longest wait of my life. Here's some cheats I picked up. To type them in you've accessed the console.

✷bot_kill: Instantly kills every Bot on the level
✷restart: Restarts the map but doesn't invalidate your progress
✷cl_levellocks 16382: Unlocks all the Condition Zero Deleted Scenes

Paul, Leeds

CVG We don't get many PC cheats in – keep 'em coming, boys.

LIFE SAVER

ONIMUSHA 3

PS2

Completing the game on Normal mode unlocks loads of stuff like secret outfits for Jacques and Samanosuke, a shooting mini-game and harder difficulty levels, but the coolest thing you get is the three most powerful weapons from the first Onimusha. To get 'em, start a new game and you'll find them in the Parisian alley Samanosuke first teleports into.

Dylan, Southampton

CVG Yes! I've spent many long hours playing with Sama's chopper, so I'd love to get to grips with it again.

FLATLINER

LIFELINE

PS2

I read that you guys had been asking Rio to 'take a shower' and telling her you loved her. Well, I've discovered another cool voice command. Tell her to 'bark like a dog' and she'll woof away for you!

Colin, Dundee

CVG It's official - Rio does it doggystyle. Can't blame the girl, but other than that she's a right sour-faced biffer. The bodybag's waiting.

You've got questions, Nurse CVG's got a cracking pair of... erm, answers

I was having a good look at my first aid box the other day and I was a bit worried about how empty it looked. A nurse can't have an empty box, especially when you lot need some gaming first aid.

So I nipped upstairs to see the CVG lads. It was brilliant because everyone seemed dead keen to stuff me brimful of hot tippage. I've got hot skinny on Fallout: Brotherhood Of Steel's secret weapons, so many fresh Enter The Matrix codes they're dripping down my legs and an absolutely cracking tips special for agricultural sex-fest Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life.

Another month, another CVG First Aid Kit bursting at the seams with the hintage goodness. Still after some healing for your joypad sores? If you don't ask you don't get...

GAMING WOUNDS WIPED CLEAN

FALLOUT: BROTHERHOOD OF STEEL

PS2, XB

I've been caning Brotherhood Of Steel but now I'm up against tougher bad guys I'm a bit stuck. I've heard rumours that there are secret weapons hidden in the game that make completing it a piece of piss. Do you know where they are?

Cameron, Brighton

***CVG** Grazza likes Fallout's post-apocalyptic setting and roaming mutants. Reminds him of Dundee.*

Red Ryder BB Gun
To get this be quick and save every townsperson in the Burning Carbon level.

Meat Cannon
The next weapon is located at the exit of the Bridge East area in Los. Stand next to the save point and jump to the east. You'll land on an invisible path. Walk straight east, run around the ghouls, open the meat locker, and you'll get the Meat Cannon.

The Slugger
At the end of the Docks Shipyard level head north-west instead of leaving and you'll fight a Ghoul boss. Kick his arse and you'll get the Slugger!

PATCH ME UP, PATCH ME IN

ENTER THE MATRIX

PS2, XB, GC

I recently bought Enter The Matrix on Platinum and my mates have been speaking about these new mini-games. Are they talking crap or do these games really exist?

***CVG** They do exist. Or do they? The choice is yours. If you believe they exist then they probably do. Actually, they DO exist and they're accessed through the Sparks Training Construct:*

Building Jump
Once you're in the Training Construct go through the brown door to your left. Go to the button icon on the left hand side and press Square (PS2), X (Xb) or B (GC). Collect as many rings as you can in 150 seconds.

Sniper Game
Go through the brown door again. Go to the button icon on the right-hand side and press Square (PS2), X (Xb) or B (GC). Shoot all the SWATs.

Multiplayer One-On-One Fighting
You need two controllers inserted when loading the game. In Training construct, pick a level and characters then batter the living crap out of each other.

THIS MONTH'S KISS OF LIFE

HARVEST MOON: A WONDERFUL LIFE

GC

Could you fix me up with some tips to make the early stages of Harvest Moon a bit more fun? And what about the girls? The guys at CVG are obviously experts on women.

Martin, Devon

***CVG** Experts on women? Are you having a laugh? Except that Paul Davies – what an absolute love god! He's packed a lot of column inches into my tips pages over the last few months, if you know what I mean.*

Why does it always rain on me?
Stop rain by going into the Mine and digging. When you leave the weather's all cleared up! This even works on massive hurricanes!

Horsing around
If you need your horse but the nag's buggered off try double tapping R. Your horse will come from anywhere in town!

You snooze, you lose
Sleep, save the game, watch the cutscene, then reset your Cube. When you load up your save you'll be fully rested but no time will have passed!

Celia
Celia's all quiet and sweet. She works on Vesta's farm and knows a suspicious amount about plants and herbs, which makes us wonder if she's actually a ganja-loving stoner. Marry her and you'll have a lovely mellow kid.
Celia likes: *Flowers, Vegetables, Eggs, Crystals, Shiny Coins.*

Muffy
Way-hey! As you'd expect from a country girl with a porn star name, Muffy's a right little slapper. Think Paris Hilton in The Simple Life. Woof! Have a kid with her and it'll be an uncontrollable little turd.
Muffy likes: *Flowers, Crystals, Shiny Coins, Sweets.*

Nami
Nami is intelligent, independent, well-travelled and experienced in the ways of the world. This is bad. It GIVES HER IDEAS OF HER OWN. If you have a child with her it will be a loser geek and won't play football.
Nami likes: *Clay Statues, Fossils, Blue Trick Flowers, Curry.*

Cat
If you want to get your hands on a nice soft pussy you've got to make pals with Romana. In Autumn of Chapter 2, sleep later than your wife and Romana will turn up at your door and offer you her pussy. Cat.

Ducks
Damn it, we love ducks. They always fit the bill. Buy a pond from Takakura then wait for Summer in Chapter 2. Sleep later than your wife and you'll get a serious quack attack in your pond.

Goat
The only time you can get hold of a goat is from Van's shop in Spring. Be quick, he won't wait for you. And it's only 4,000G. Baa-rgain.

The tortoise or two ducks... Must. Get. Real. Girlfriend

SURGERY IS ALWAYS OPEN!

Take advantage of Nurse CVG! Phwoar, I'd like to take advantage of her, get out my thermometer and take her temperature, and so on. Send your tips, cheats, strategies and questions to the email address below.

TEXT 4 TIPS

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BE A CVG SILENT ASSASSIN!

Knock off our Hitman Contracts competition!

Not that we're condoning gratuitous violence or anything, but assassins are cool, right? They've got all the best guns and get paid loads of money just to bump people off.

And there's no assassin cooler than old cloned baldie himself, Agent 47. The star of Eidos' massive Hitman series is a true guru of slick, stylish death. He's even got a well smart suit, a couple of blingin' Silverballers, and cheek bones that make Kate Moss look like a fat munter. Not that we fancy him or anything.

That's why we've hooked up with Eidos to offer you the chance to dress snappily with a Contracts T-shirt 'n' watch, and embark on a career of international assassination. Not in real life – your mum would be well pissed off. You'll get to kill people without getting blood on your threads by playing Contracts on your fancy new Crystal Xbox!

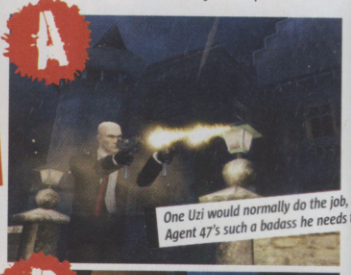
All you've got to do is check out the screenshots to the right and send or text us the answer to the question. Your killing career depends on it! ✷

TO WIN: SPOT THE MARK OF A TRUE SILENT ASSASSIN!

True masters of death can bring the pain with anything lying around.

To scoop CVG's prizes all you have to do is tell us which one of these pics shows Agent 47 improvising his murder with an unlikely weapon...

A



One Uzi would normally do the job, but Agent 47's such a badass he needs two

B

Eat that, tweedy. Country squires wearing Emmerdale-style jumpers deserve to get shotgunned

C

But to be a real silent assassin you've got to stove people heads in with whatever's lying around. Like a fire poker

WIN ALL THIS!

- ✷ **First Prize:** Limited Edition Crystal Xbox, copy of Hitman Contracts, Hitman watch worth £75, Hitman T-shirt.
- ✷ **Second Prize:** Copy of Hitman Contracts, Hitman watch worth £75, Hitman T-shirt.
- ✷ **Five runners-up:** Copy of Hitman Contracts, Hitman watch worth £25, Hitman T-shirt.

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Tick one of the following boxes
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They're gonna have to saw our hands off 'cos we're never letting go of Sony's wonder handheld once we've had a touch!

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White hot or white elephant? Can two screens really mean double the pleasure? We'll reveal all from Nintendo's booth of death!

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Revealed! Finally! Check out our definitive guide to the mysterious new next-gen monster on the block

PLUS! E3 SCORCHERS REVEALED!

DOOM 3

We play kissy face with the scariest monsters you've ever seen on a PC or Xbox. We can't wait to get blown (away)

METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER

We've seen camouflage, survival techniques and context-sensitive close combat. What else can Kojima pull out of the hat?

GRAN TURISMO 4

So close now we can smell the gasoline and burning rubber. We'll be playing it online at E3... Read it and weep!

PLUS! **EAT THESE REVIEWS!** Red Dead Revolver, Shellshock: Nam '67, Thief: Deadly Shadows, Phantasy Star Online Episode III: C.A.R.D. Revolution, The X-Files: Resist Or Serve, Smash Court Tennis Pro Tournament 2, Sonic Advance 3, F-Zero: GP Legend, Legends Of Wrestling: Showdown, Perimeter

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1994

ISSUE 148

Today, every other new release seems to be a first-person shooter. Ten years ago witnessed the birth of the revolution

BEST GAMES #148
- Sim City 2000 94%
- Sonic 3 94%

A tie between two heavyweight sequels, but Doom, which only got 93%, was totally robbed

WORST GAME #148
- Batman Returns 20%

Lame movie tie-in that turned the caped crusader into the crap crusader!

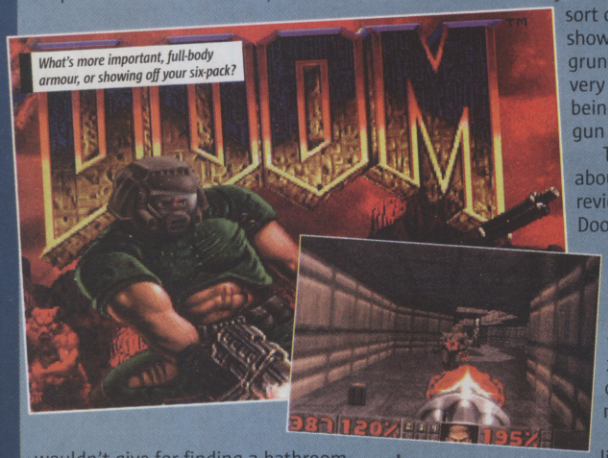
COUNT YOURSELF LUCKY
- That modern games have much tougher sounding names than Twinbee Rainbow Belladventure!

Going gaga for Half-Life 2 this month got us thinking about Gordon Freeman. Hands up who thought one of the most kick-ass games of the year would star a man with glasses and a goatee? What's more, he's not a cop with a grudge, or a gung-ho military man – he's just a scientist wearing a lab coat who's having a very bad day. Has there ever been a nerdier action hero?

Luckily though, as is the case with most first-person shooters, it doesn't really matter what the hero looks like. Most of the time all you see of them are their arms, and if you look down, maybe their feet. Okay, sometimes you walk past a mirror or a glass window and the reflection of your alter-ego can give you a nasty surprise.

But for all the fancy physics and non-scripted action of Half-Life 2, what we wouldn't give for finding a bathroom with a razor, some shaving foam and a pair of contact lenses.

"ALL FPS HEROES HAD A SQUARE JAW AND BUZZ CUT. EXCEPT WOLFENSTEIN'S HERO LOOKED LIKED POP STAR PINK"



What's more important, full-body armour, or showing off your six-pack?

IN THE BEGINNING

Ten years back no-one thought twice about what the hero of a first-person shooter looked like. All that mattered was the weaponry and maybe a pair of bulging biceps to lug around all that heavy duty hardware. Just check out the original Doom on PC.

The hero wore some fancy body armour and a strange sci-fi helmet that seems to have been handed over to Master Chief in Halo. More disturbing was that the body armour was a weird sort of crop-top that showed off Doom grunt's six-pack. Not very practical when being hit by a chain-gun at close quarters!

The funniest thing about revisiting our review of the original Doom is that the term FPS hadn't been invented back then. Ten years ago things were all still very 2D. So how to convey Doom's new approach?

"Doom is a bit like Alien Breed in 3D, but twice as atmospheric and 10 times as violent." See, easy when you know how – and assuming you've played Alien Breed, of course.

Doom meant the end for on-rails shooters like Lethal Enforcers – good thing too. Is that guy giving the thumbs up or does he actually have a gun? Ahh, such glorious graphics

WOLF WHISTLE

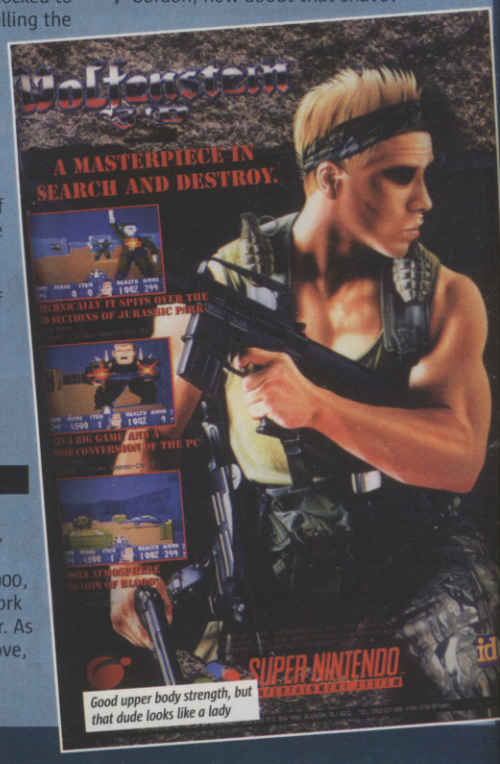
In the same issue we were shocked to see a female impersonator selling the SNES version of Wolfenstein 3D, the godfather of first-person shooters. Once again, here was a title where it didn't matter what the hero looked like, it was the action that really counted.

Like Doom, a small face of the hero at the bottom of the screen was the only indicator as to what you looked like. Surprisingly, all FPS heroes of this era were blonde, had a very square jaw and a buzz cut. Except in the advert, where Wolfie's hero bore a striking resemblance to dirty pop vixen Pink.

FROM OUTER SPACE

Not enough first-person shooting for one issue? Okay, here's another one: Alien Vs Predator. Next to Tempest 2000, this was the only reason to fork out for the awful Atari Jaguar. As you'll see from the cover above, CVG thought that the chest-burster going head-to-head with the skull-polisher was an event not to be missed. For once here was a shooter that had recognisable characters. Ugly, but definitely very recognisable.

Ten years ago the hero character was half the game. Sonic, Mario, Chuck Rock even Soccer Kid. You couldn't hide from a platformer with a cartoon face staring back at you. For that reason alone, we should be grateful for Doom and its FPS brethren. They killed off the characters and made the game the star again. Now Gordon, how about that shave?



Good upper body strength, but that dude looks like a lady

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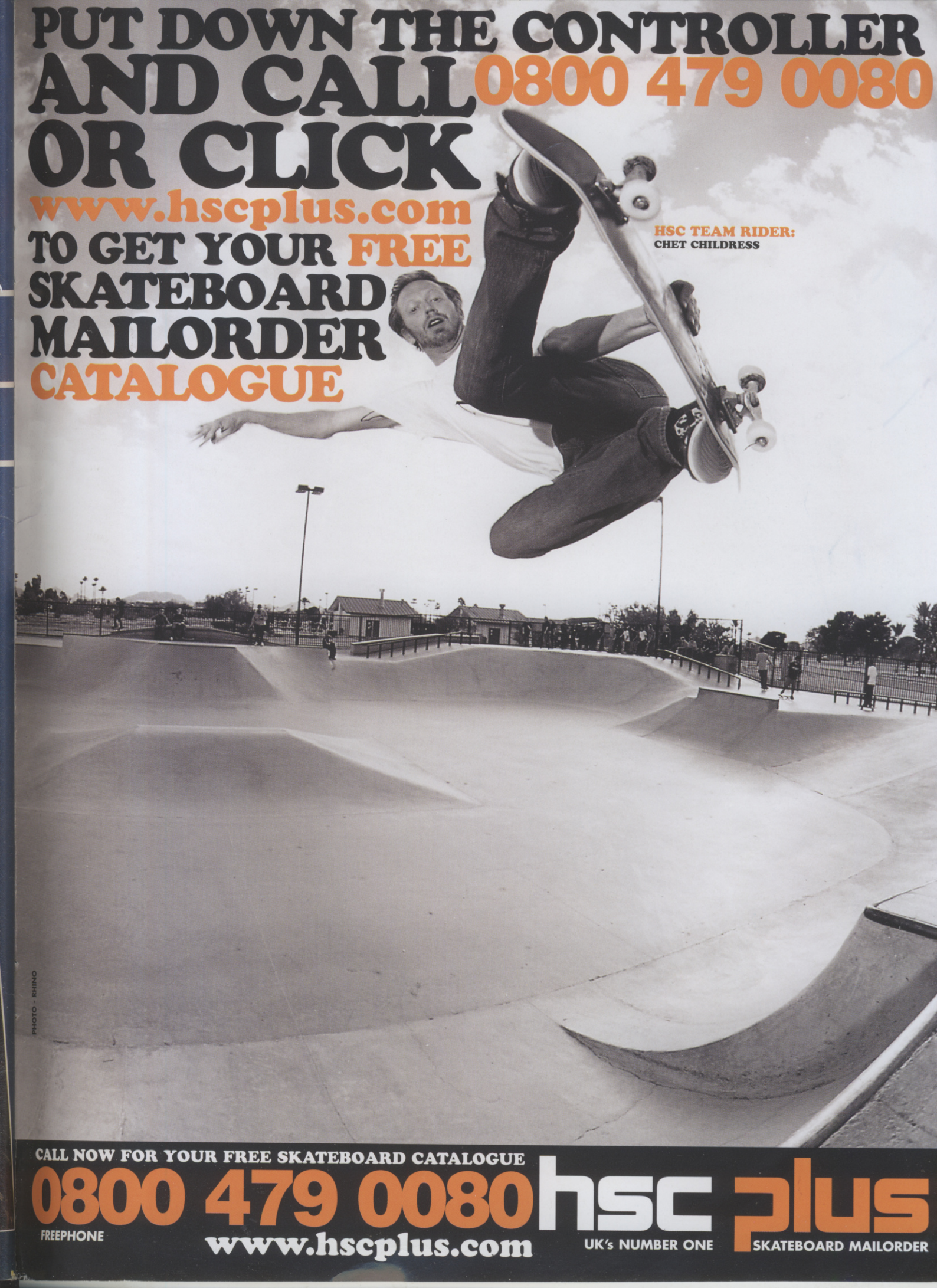

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